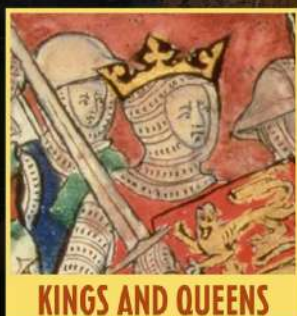


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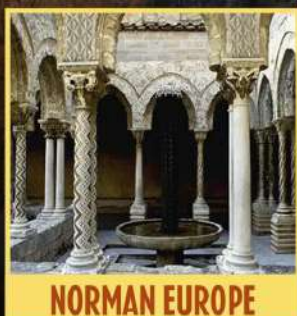
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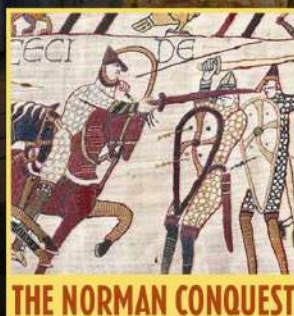
THE STORY OF THE NORMANS



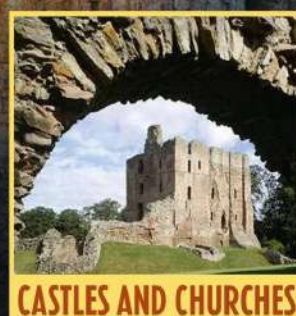
KINGS AND QUEENS



NORMAN EUROPE



THE NORMAN CONQUEST



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“It is surely the most famous date in English history. On 14 October 1066 William of Normandy's army defeated and killed King Harold at the battle of Hastings. It was the decisive moment in the Norman conquest of England, which heralded the end of the Anglo-Saxon era and brought profound changes to the country whose effects are still felt today.

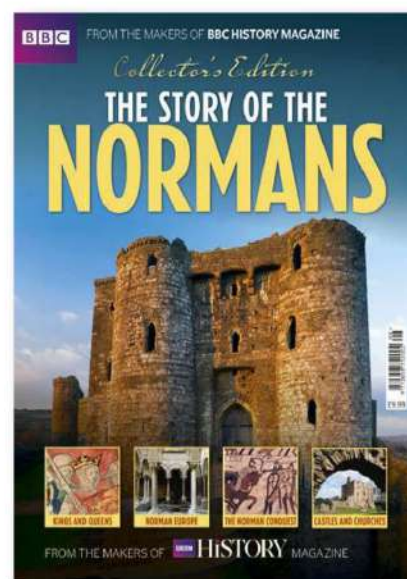
To mark the 950th anniversary of William's great victory, we've put together this collector's edition, which charts the history of the Normans, from their Viking origins to the reign of their last English monarch. You will discover how the rulers of a small patch of land in northern France managed to conquer the powerful Anglo-Saxon realm, and spread their wings even further afield to the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Plus, you'll find explorations of some of the Normans' most famous achievements, including the Bayeux tapestry, Domesday Book and their astonishing castles and cathedrals.

The Story of the Normans brings together some articles that have appeared previously in *BBC History Magazine* along with lots of new content commissioned specially for this edition. All of the pieces are written by expert historians and, as you'll see, there is still plenty of lively debate about the key moments and characters of the Norman age. Even at a distance of almost 1,000 years, history rarely stands still.

Rob Attar

Editor

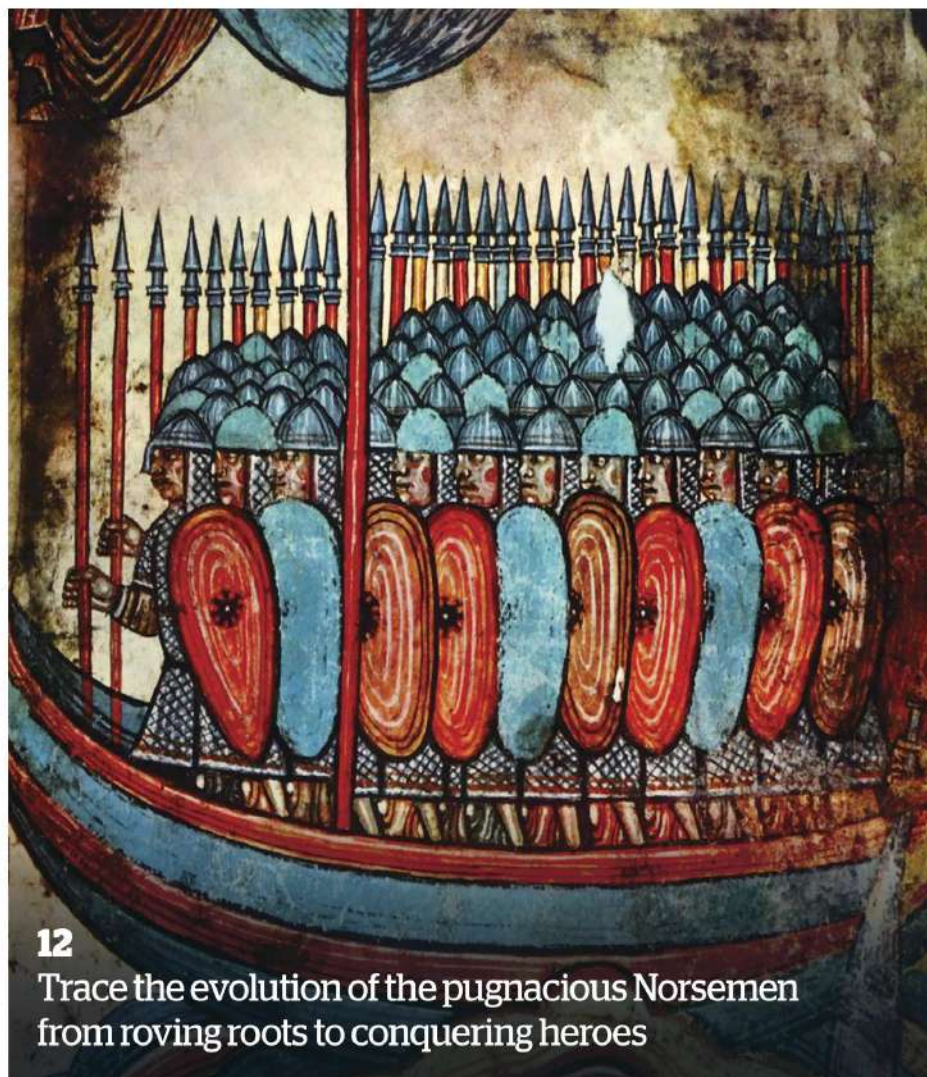
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“The scale of the transformation wrought by the Normans in England remains visible almost a millennium after their arrival”

Historian **MARC MORRIS** explores how Norman conquerors changed the physical, social and religious landscape of Britain on page 112

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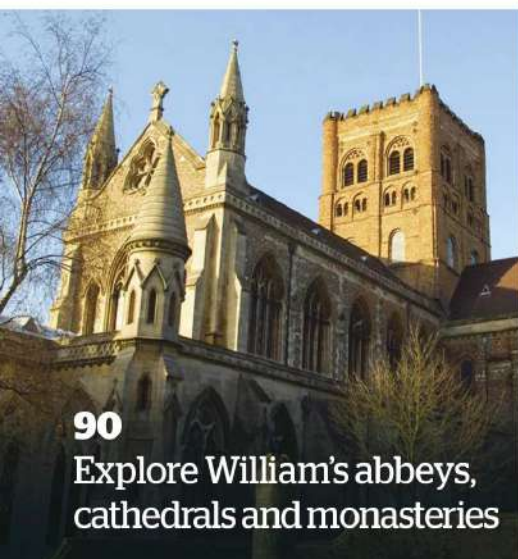
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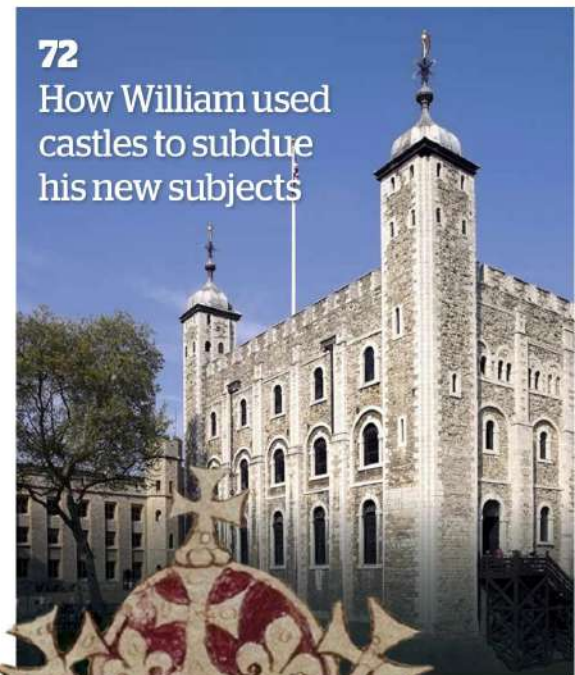


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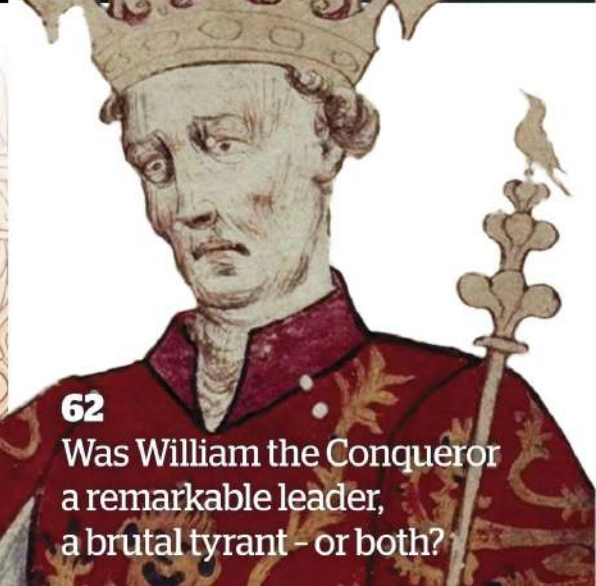


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MEET NORMAN

Follow the rise of England's conquerors
from roving Scandinavians to dukes of
northern France and expansionists
dominating swathes of Europe



THE VIKINGS



The Normans

Marc Morris traces their story from Viking settlement in northern France to the loss of Normandy by King John



William the Conqueror, depicted in Matthew Paris's chronicle *Historia Anglorum* (circa 1250–59)

911

According to later writer Dudo of Saint-Quentin, in this year the king of the Franks, Charles the Simple, grants land around the city of Rouen to Rollo, or Rolf, leader of the Vikings who have settled the region: **the duchy of Normandy is founded**. In return Rollo undertakes to protect the area and to receive baptism, taking the Christian name Robert.



Arsène Letellier's 19th-century statue of Duke Rollo in Rouen

1016

A group of Norman pilgrims en route to Jerusalem are 'invited' to help liberate southern Italy from Byzantine (Greek) control. Norman knights have already been operating as mercenaries here since the turn of the first millennium, selling their military services to rival Lombard, Greek and Muslim rulers.

1051

Duke William visits England. His rule in Normandy now established, and newly married to Matilda of Flanders, **William crosses the Channel to speak with his second cousin, King Edward the Confessor** of England. The subject of their conference is unknown, but later chroniclers assert that at this time Edward promises William the English succession.

1000

1050



An English silver penny minted c991 during the reign of King Æthelred the Unready

1002

Emma, sister of Duke Richard II of Normandy, marries Æthelred ('the Unready'), king of England. Their son, the future Edward the Confessor, flees to Normandy 14 years later when England is conquered by King Cnut, and remains there for the next quarter of a century. This dynastic link is later used as one of the justifications for the Norman conquest.

1035

Having ruled Normandy for eight years, Duke Robert I falls ill on his return from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and dies at Nicaea. By prior agreement, **Robert is succeeded by his illegitimate son William**, the future Conqueror of England, then aged just seven or eight. A decade of violence follows as Norman nobles fight each other for control of the young duke and his duchy.

1059

Pope Nicholas II invests the Norman Robert Guiscard with the dukedoms of Apulia, Calabria and Sicily. The popes had opposed the ambitions of the Normans in Italy, but defeat in battle at Civitate in southern Italy in 1053 had caused them to reconsider. In 1060 Robert and his brother Roger embark on the conquest of Sicily, and Roger subsequently rules the island as its great count.

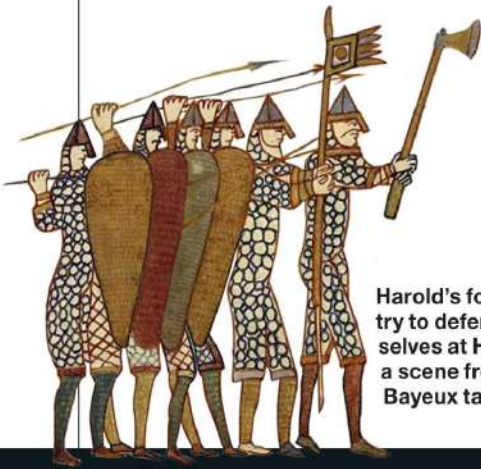
The Norman army of Roger I defeats a vast Saracen army at Cerami, Sicily in 1063, in a 19th-century painting by Prosper Lafaye



ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

1066

Edward the Confessor dies on 5 January, and the throne is immediately taken by his brother-in-law Harold Godwinson, the most powerful earl in England, with strong popular backing. Harold defeats his Norwegian namesake at Stamford Bridge in September. But on 14 October **William's Norman forces defeat Harold's army at Hastings**. William is crowned as England's king on Christmas Day.



Harold's foot soldiers try to defend themselves at Hastings in a scene from the Bayeux tapestry



A 19th-century illustration shows scribes compiling the results of William's great survey in Domesday Book

1086

Worried by the threat of Danish invasion, at Christmas 1085 **William decides to survey his kingdom** – partly to assess its wealth, and partly to settle arguments about landownership created by 20 years of conquest. The results, later redacted and **compiled as Domesday Book**, are probably brought to him in August 1086 at Old Sarum (near Salisbury), where all landowners swear an oath to him.

1080

1069

The initial years of William's reign in England are marked by almost constant English rebellion, matched by violent Norman repression. In autumn 1069 a fresh English revolt is triggered by a Danish invasion. **William responds by laying waste to the country north of the Humber**, destroying crops and cattle in a campaign that becomes known as the **Harrying of the North**, leading to widespread famine and death.



A scene from the Bayeux tapestry shows Normans wreaking destruction on England

1087

William retaliates against a French invasion of Normandy. While attacking Mantes he is taken ill or injured – possibly damaging his intestines on the pommel of his saddle – and retires to Rouen, where **he dies on 9 September**. Taken to Caen for burial, his body proves too fat for its stone sarcophagus, and bursts when monks try to force it in. His eldest surviving son, Robert Curthose, becomes duke of Normandy, while England passes to his second son, William Rufus.

A late-15th-century French illustration shows William's funeral in Caen





The siege of Jerusalem during the First Crusade in 1099, shown in a 13th-century illumination

1096

Following a call to arms by Pope Urban II in 1095, many **Normans set out towards the Holy Land on the First Crusade**, determined to recover Jerusalem. Among them are Robert Curthose, who mortgages Normandy to his younger brother, William Rufus, and William the Conqueror's notorious half-brother, Bishop Odo of Bayeux. Odo dies en route and is buried in Palermo, but Robert goes on to win victories in Palestine and is present when Jerusalem falls.

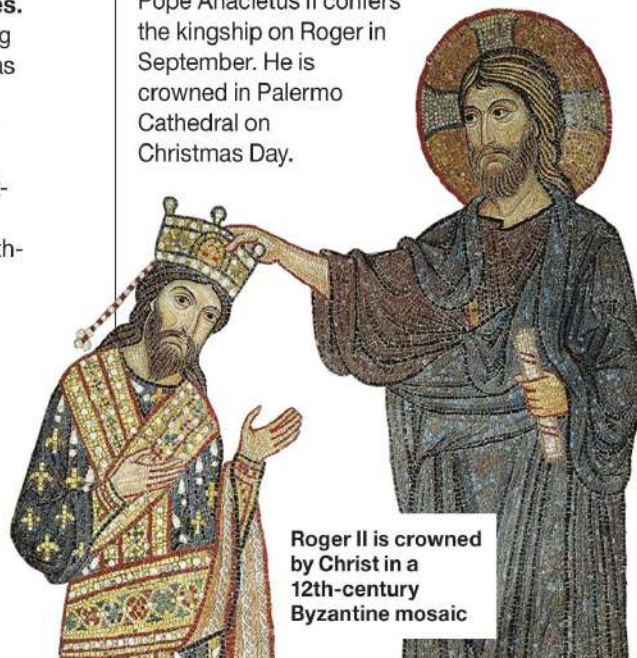
1101

Roger I of Sicily dies.

By the end of his long rule, Count Roger has gained control over the whole of Sicily – the central Muslim town of Enna submitted in 1087, and the last emirs in the south-east surrendered in 1091. He is briefly succeeded by his eldest son, Simon, but the new count dies in 1105 and is succeeded by his younger brother, Roger II.

1130

Roger II is crowned king of Sicily, having pushed for royal status in order to assert his authority over the barons of southern Italy. A disputed papal succession in 1130 has provided an opportunity and, in return for support against a papal rival, Pope Anacletus II confers the kingship on Roger in September. He is crowned in Palermo Cathedral on Christmas Day.



Roger II is crowned by Christ in a 12th-century Byzantine mosaic

1100

1100

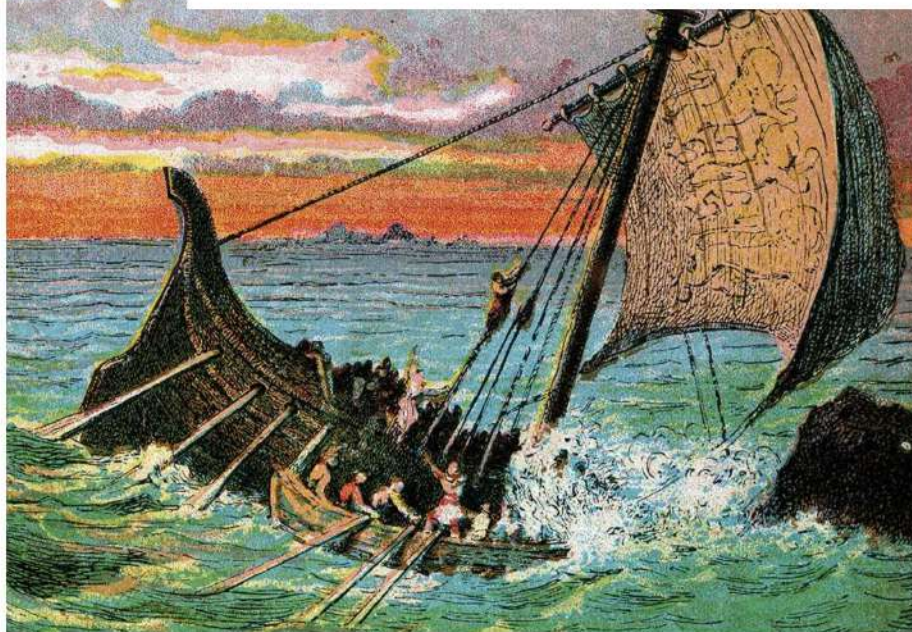
Having succeeded his father in 1087 and defeated Robert Curthose's attempts to unseat him, the rule of William II ('Rufus', depicted below) seems secure. But on 2 August 1100, while hunting in the New Forest with some of his barons, **William is struck by a stray arrow and killed**. His body is carted to Winchester for burial, and the English throne passes to his younger brother, Henry, who is crowned in Westminster Abbey just three days later.



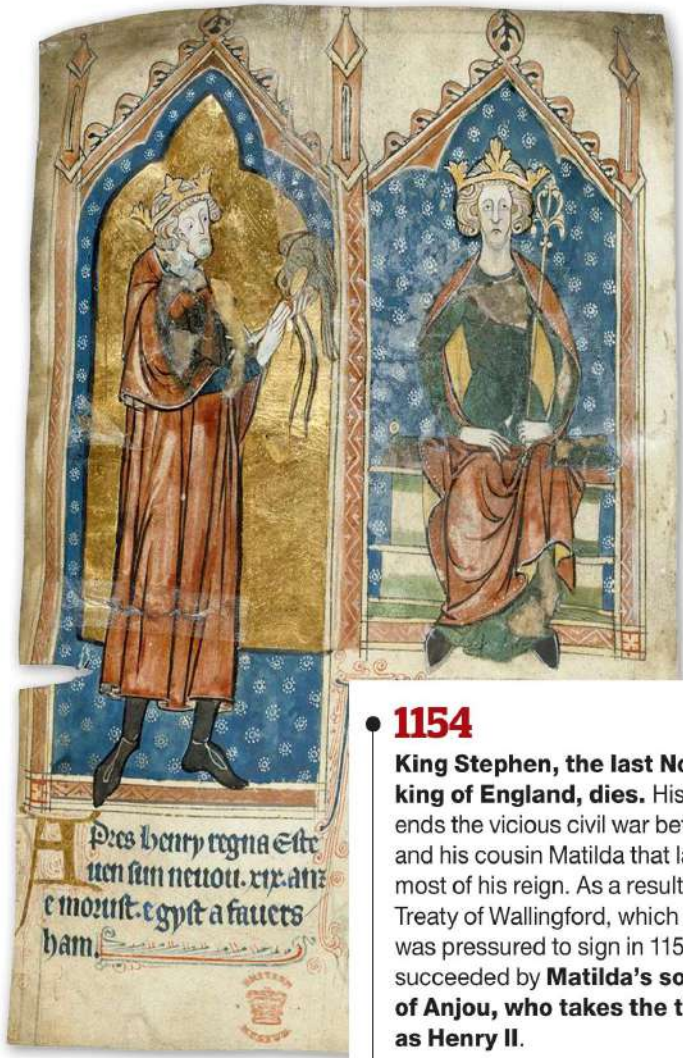
The wreck of King Henry's White Ship, shown in a c1850 illustration

1120

On 25 November Henry I sets out across the Channel from Normandy to England. One of the vessels in his fleet, the White Ship, strikes a rock soon after its departure, with the loss of all but one of its passengers. **One of the drowned is the king's only legitimate son, William Ætheling**. Henry responds by fixing the succession on his daughter, Matilda, and marrying her to Geoffrey Plantagenet, count of Anjou.



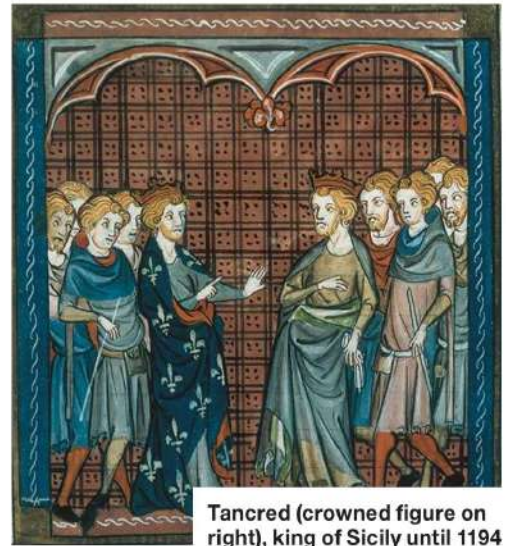
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King Stephen is pictured as a falconer alongside his successor, Henry II, in a late-13th-century manuscript

1154

King Stephen, the last Norman king of England, dies. His death ends the vicious civil war between him and his cousin Matilda that lasted for most of his reign. As a result of the Treaty of Wallingford, which Stephen was pressured to sign in 1153, he is succeeded by **Matilda's son Henry of Anjou, who takes the throne as Henry II.**



Tancred (crowned figure on right), king of Sicily until 1194

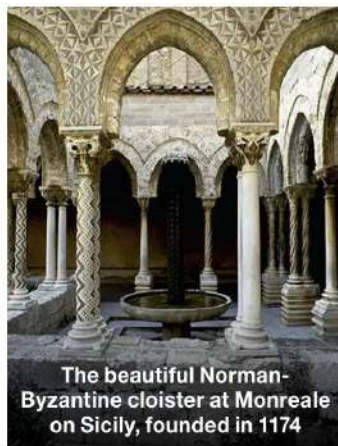
1194

Norman rule on Sicily ends. Tancred of Lecce, son of Roger III, Duke of Apulia, seizes the throne on William's death in 1189; on his death in 1194 he is succeeded by his young son, William III. Eight months later, Holy Roman Emperor Henry VI, husband of Roger II's daughter Constance, invades Sicily and is crowned in Palermo on Christmas Day. The following day, Constance gives birth to their son, the future Frederick II.

1150

1135

Henry I dies in Normandy on 1 December, reportedly after ignoring doctor's orders and eating his favourite dish: lampreys. His body is shipped back to England for burial at the abbey he founded in Reading. Many of his barons reject the rule of his daughter, Matilda, instead backing his nephew, **Stephen, who is crowned as England's new king on 22 December.**



The beautiful Norman-Byzantine cloister at Monreale on Sicily, founded in 1174

1174

King William II of Sicily begins the construction of the great church at Monreale ('Mount Royal'), nine miles from his capital at Palermo. The building is a fusion of Byzantine, Latin and Muslim architectural styles, and is decorated throughout with gold mosaics, including the earliest depiction of Thomas Becket, martyred in 1170.

1204

King John loses Normandy to the French. The youngest son of Henry II, John had succeeded to England, Normandy, Anjou and Aquitaine after the death of his elder brother, Richard the Lionheart, in 1199. But in just five years he lost almost all of his continental lands to his rival King Philip Augustus of France – the **end of England's link with Normandy.**



The siege of Chateau Gaillard, which ended in defeat for John and the loss of Normandy in 1204

WHO WERE THE NORMANS?

How did a group of rowdy itinerant Scandinavians come to dominate swathes of Europe for more than two centuries? **Alex Burghart** tackles the big questions about the origins of the Normans and their enduring influence

An 11th-century
French illustration
shows battle-ready
Norman soldiers
crossing the
English Channel



The Normans were the violent parvenu opportunists of their day: Vikings who settled in Normandy and became French before conquering

England and becoming English.

From obscure Scandinavian origins, the Normans relied on their military proficiency – and ruthlessness – to dominate the institutions and elites of Europe, and assimilated cultures, ideas and whole political systems in their pursuit of glory. Norman knights and generals occupied areas from the lowlands of Scotland to the deserts of the near east, thrusting themselves into the midst of conflicts and seizing chances whenever they appeared. They also left behind some of the most remarkable ecclesiastical and military architecture of the period, which speaks volumes about both their self-importance and their piety.

Where did the Normans come from?

The people who became Normans burst on to the historical scene in the violent and tempestuous late ninth century. At that time northern Europe was beset by a 'Great Army' of Danes whose various divisions came close to conquering all of England, and who wreaked havoc in northern France.

At about the same time a group of 'Northmen' started to settle around the mouth of the river Seine. Quite where they came from is unclear. The sources for the period are poor, and later medieval historians had different views – some thought that Rollo (also known as Hrólfr), their leader, had been Danish, others that he had been Norwegian. He is surrounded by various legends, including the spectacular statement found in later Icelandic sagas that he was known as 'Hrólfr the Walker' (Ganger-Hrólfr) because he was so large that no horse could carry him.

At around 911, King Charles III ('the Simple') of West Francia (an early forerunner of France) signed a treaty with Rollo: Charles recognised the Northmen's right to stay in his kingdom, and they recognised his right to be king. It is likely that Charles did not have much choice, and that disturbances elsewhere in his kingdom meant he needed to buy himself



Rollo 'the Dane', who became the first Duke of Normandy c911, as portrayed by French printmaker Antoine-Louis-François Sergent-Marceau in the late 18th century

a little peace. Yet what Charles managed to extract from the situation was the Normans' acceptance that – however nominally – this was his turf, and that, if they wanted to live in peace, they would have to become Christians.

A century later, the Norman historian Dudo of Saint-Quentin wrote that when Rollo was asked to kiss King Charles's foot in subjection, he had refused and instead told one of his men that they should do it for him. "The man immediately grasped the king's foot and raised it to his mouth and planted a kiss on it while he remained standing, and laid the king flat on his back," reported Dudo. This may well be an apocryphal tale – but, even if it is, it tells us something of how the Normans saw the treaty and their place within the French king's realm. They were vassals only in name.

Yet in accepting the king's terms and staying in France, the Normans allowed themselves to change. As the historian Simon Coupland has put it: "The Vikings became Normans, the pagans became Christians, and thereby, in the eyes of their contemporaries, the barbarians joined civilisation." The Normans had arrived.

Why did the Normans invade England?

It is unlikely that Charles the Simple foresaw that the Normans would still be knocking

around his kingdom's northern reaches 150 years after he had bought them off.

He almost certainly saw his treaty as a chance to buy time while he put out fires elsewhere. How wrong he was.

In 1066 Rollo's great-great-grandson, Duke William ('the Bastard'), would become one of the most famous men of medieval times – indeed, one of the most famous men in all history – when he launched a successful invasion of England.

The causes of the Norman conquest are not completely easy to unpick.

William was related to King Edward the Confessor (whose death precipitated the invasion), though not in the most direct way. Edward's mother, Emma, was the daughter of Duke Richard of Normandy ('the Fearless'), who was William's great-grandfather. King Æthelred the Unready of England had married Emma in an attempt to prevent Normandy being used as a base for Viking armies attacking England – but although their son, Edward, had Norman blood in his veins, no English blood could be said to course through William's.

William would argue that Edward the Confessor had promised him the throne, and that Harold Godwinson (the English contender) had done likewise while in Normandy in 1064; indeed, a famous scene in the Bayeux Tapestry shows Harold swearing on holy relics that he will uphold William's claim. Conversely, Harold would say that Edward, on his deathbed, had given his kingdom to the Englishman.

The problem with these stories is that the English crown was not something that the incumbent could simply bestow upon his favourite. The rights to England had, since the emergence of the united kingdom in the tenth century, passed to the immediate relatives of the deceased king – excepting only when it had been conquered by Danes. Edward may have been childless, but there was a legitimate heir: Edgar the Ætheling, grandson of King Edmund II, to whom the crown should have passed. However, Edgar's youth – he was probably about 15 – is likely to have encouraged ambitious nobles to prowl.

Regardless of what promises had been made, William saw his opportunity to progress from being duke of a mere promontory in northern France to king of one



William would argue that Edward the Confessor had promised him the throne, and that Harold Godwinson had done likewise

Two scenes from the Bayeux tapestry show King Edward the Confessor (above), and Harold Godwinson (below) swearing an oath of fealty to Duke William of Normandy on holy relics in 1064



of the wealthiest realms in northern Europe. Inspired, no doubt, by the success of King Cnut only 50 years before, he gathered a great army of nobles and mercenaries, and mounted an invasion that would ultimately have huge ramifications for world history.

What impact did the Normans have on the other parts of the British Isles?

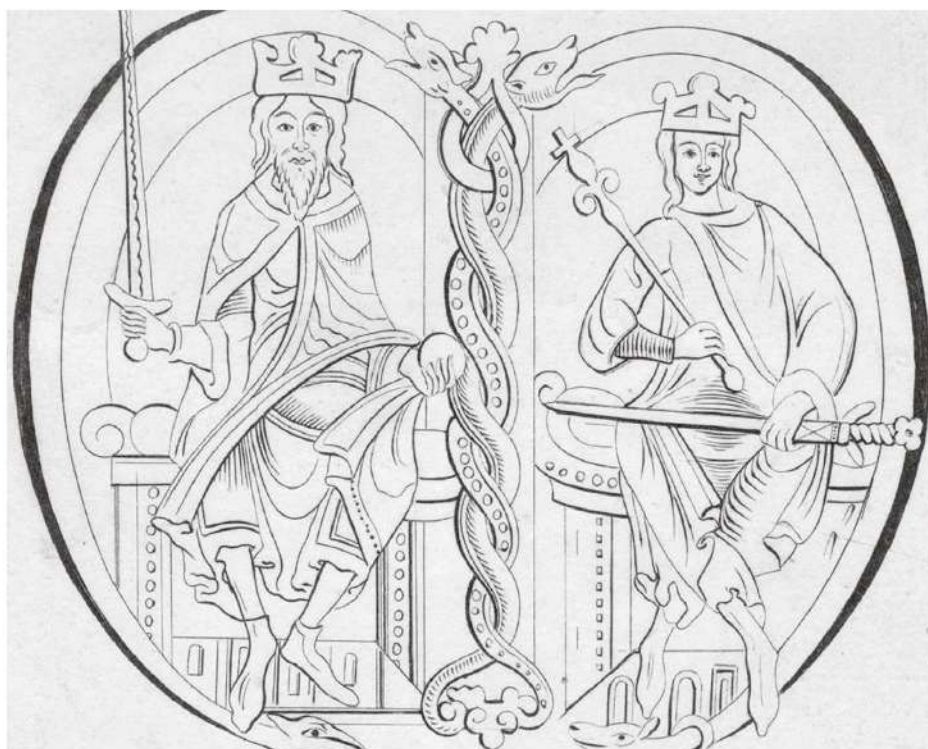
The battle of Hastings is one of the most dramatic historical watersheds. The Anglo-Saxon regime was thoroughly defeated, a great number of its nobility killed, and its survivors displaced by the Conqueror's machinations. Over the next century and more, the aftershocks of their victory spread far beyond England into Scotland, Wales and Ireland.

Scotland was never conquered, but Norman influence was felt in profound ways. The younger sons of Anglo-Norman families found Scotland a place where their skills were appreciated. David I of Scotland (1124–53), who had spent his youth in England and had the title Earl of Huntingdon through marriage, took English experiences north with him when he became king. He created new lordships owing feudal services out of the royal demesne, which he then gave to Anglo-Normans keen to do his bidding. Their influence effected deep changes in the nature and character of Scottish politics and of government.

The Welsh and the English had endured a fractious relationship for over 600 years before the Conquest; though Wales retained its own princes and kings, they had often accepted the overlordship of English kings. In the fraught years that followed Hastings, William needed to secure his western flank and prevent the sort of incursions for which the Welsh were famous.

To do this, he established marcher lords in Chester, Shrewsbury and Hereford who acted almost as petty kings, with their own courts and chanceries, and their own license to make war on the Welsh. By degrees, Norman kings and their subordinates subdued Wales, building castles, allowing their own people to settle the southern lowlands, and bringing it under the rule of the kings of England. Yet the fact that this conquest took 200 years is testament to the resistance they faced.

Norman involvement in Ireland began with these same free-agent warmakers. In 1166 Dermot MacMurrough, king of Leinster, was deprived of his throne and sought the help of the Anglo-Norman King Henry II. Henry was too busy to lend a hand, but Dermot eventually found support from the Earl of Pembroke, known as 'Strongbow'. Strongbow captured Wexford, Waterford and Dublin; when Dermot died in 1171, Strongbow tried to claim the kingship for himself. Henry II, concerned by the growth of Strongbow's



A copy of a 12th-century illumination shows David I of Scotland with his grandson, Malcolm IV. David's upbringing among Normans had a profound impact on Scottish politics and government

Scotland was never conquered by the Normans, but their influence was felt in profound ways

power, took a huge force to Ireland, obliging the Norman warlords to hand him their conquered territories. In doing so he became the first king of England to set foot on Irish soil, and so began the English kingdom's claims to lands and lordship in Ireland.

How did the Normans come to be involved in the Mediterranean?

The Scandinavians of the early Middle Ages were nothing if not adventurous. Their seagoing ways took them to Iceland, Greenland and North America, and their quest for gold and excitement sent them down the great rivers of western Russia to the Black Sea and Constantinople. Even after becoming Frenchified, the Normans retained something of this spirit.

In the early 11th century, Norman exiles became caught up in the knotty complexities of southern Italian politics. In the Mezzogiorno (roughly, everywhere south of Naples), the Lombards and Byzantines were doing hard battle with each other, while the Saracens, heavily divided among themselves, occupied Sicily. It was, in short, a land of bloody opportunity.

A family that did very well in this political climate was that of Tancred de Hauteville (980–1041), a minor Norman lord whose estates were too modest to support the needs of his 12 sons. Several of his progeny achieved success in the south, notably Robert Guiscard ('the Wily') who became Duke of Apulia, Calabria and finally, through

A pig is slaughtered in a 13th-century illumination. The Normans' linguistic influence is still clear in our different words for pig and pork



diem tuam: et nocte canticū eius
 apud me oratio deo uite mee: di
 in deo susceptor meus es.



Richard the Lionheart charges Saladin (Salah al-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub) during the Third Crusade in an illustration from a 14th-century psalter

conquest, of Sicily. The Byzantine princess and historian Anna Comnena remembered him as having “an overbearing character and a thoroughly villainous mind... He was a man of immense stature... ruddy complexion, fair hair, broad shoulders, eyes that all but shot out sparks of fire.”

Giscard's escapades, impressive though there were, paled next to those of the great endeavours of the First Crusade, in which the Normans were leading lights. Robert Curthose, William the Conqueror's eldest son, is said to have been offered (but declined) the crown of Jerusalem after its capture. Arnulf de Chocques, a former chaplain to the Norman duke, found himself responsible for rebuilding the structures of the Christian church in the Holy Land. Chronicles repeatedly stress the importance of the Norman contribution; the First Crusade clearly had a Norman backbone.

Perhaps the greatest of all images of Norman ascendancy, however, came with the Third Crusade. Richard the Lionheart – king of

England, Duke of Normandy and Aquitaine, Count of Poitiers, Anjou, Maine, Nantes and Brittany – occupied Sicily, conquered Cyprus and, as leader of the crusade, parleyed with Saladin. The scion of a petty duchy in northern France had become the negotiating equal of the great Sultan of Syria and Egypt.

What was the Normans' legacy?

We still live with the legacy of the Conquest – most notably in how we speak. The merger of Old English and Norman French into Middle and Modern English is an ongoing reminder of how two cultures were, in the decades that followed the Conquest, married together. The distinction between the lordly language of the castle and the earthy language of the field can be heard in the difference between ‘pork’ and ‘pig’, ‘mutton’ and ‘sheep’, ‘beef’ and ‘cow’ – the former all derived from Old French, the latter Old English.

Yet perhaps the most obvious visual legacy the Normans left has been their architecture.

Their particular brand of Romanesque, with its solid yet graceful semicircular arches and arcades, is found not only in Normandy but also throughout England – thanks to the Normans' comprehensive post-Conquest programme of church rebuilding – and also in their territories in the Mediterranean.

Wherever they settled, the Normans gifted their architecture to posterity – and so it is that one can still see something of their achievements and ambitions in buildings as widely separated as the great cathedral of Durham, the abbey of Saint-Étienne in Caen, the basilica of Saint Nicholas in Bari, and Cefalù Cathedral in Sicily. “Look on my works, ye mighty,” they seem to say, “and despair”. **■**

Alex Burghart is a historian specialising in the Anglo-Saxon period, and one of the authors of the Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England (www.pase.ac.uk), a database of all known people from the period

Meet the Normans / In Europe

The Turks attack the army of Bohemond I, shown in a manuscript from 1490. Bohemond founded a Norman monarchy and played a prominent role in the First Crusade



NORMANS

throughout Europe

Besides invading England, the Normans also headed south and east. As **Judith Green** reveals, they won success in southern Italy and Sicily, had territorial ambitions in Turkey, and played a prominent role in the crusades



The Normans made conquests in southern Italy. Here Bohemond I sails for Apulia during the First Crusade

The Normans stride across the pages of 11th- and 12th-century European history as larger-than-life figures, like the ones so vividly depicted on the Bayeux Tapestry.

Whether in the British Isles, southern Italy and Sicily, Spain, or on the Crusades, the Normans strutted their stuff.

Their own historians celebrated their military exploits under charismatic leaders such as William the Conqueror, Robert Guiscard, Bohemond, and Roger II, first king of Sicily. Later historians too have been inclined to accept their significance, not only in the military and political spheres but also in the worlds of government, scholarship, and in the medieval church.

How then are we to explain the impact of relatively small numbers of knights from northwestern France on European history? Should their activities in different theatres be seen as part of a single, essentially Norman, enterprise? Do they confirm the impression that the movers and shakers in the middle ages were usually men: where were the women in the Norman world?

The first question may be addressed by thinking about timing and context. In the early 11th century it can be argued that both England and Italy presented tempting targets for armed aggression, for different reasons. England, ruled by a wealthy king, succumbed to Danish rule in 1016 after decades of attack. The Norman dukes were not disinterested onlookers: sometimes they allied with the Danes, sometimes with King Æthelred, who had married Emma, daughter of Duke Richard I. Harthacnut, the last Danish king of England, died without an heir and so did his successor, Edward the Confessor.

Invasion of England

During Edward's reign the young duke of the Normans, William, had fought his way to maturity establishing a network of kin and allies, and was looking to extend his power beyond Normandy. The death of Edward without an heir, the lack of a clear line of succession in England, the fact that William was a kinsman of King Edward (and may have had some kind of pledge over the succession from him) provided him with justification to gather a force, which invaded in 1066. This included not just his core supporters from Normandy but also Bretons and Flemings who saw the chance for glory and riches.

The resulting army, possibly as many as 8,000, was led by the duke himself and aimed at the throne. Even allowing for luck, William was outstandingly successful and relatively quickly was able to establish his followers in southern England and the



A gold alloy kingdom of Sicily coin from the reign of Tancred of Lecce (c1189–94), a descendant of the Norman Hauteville family

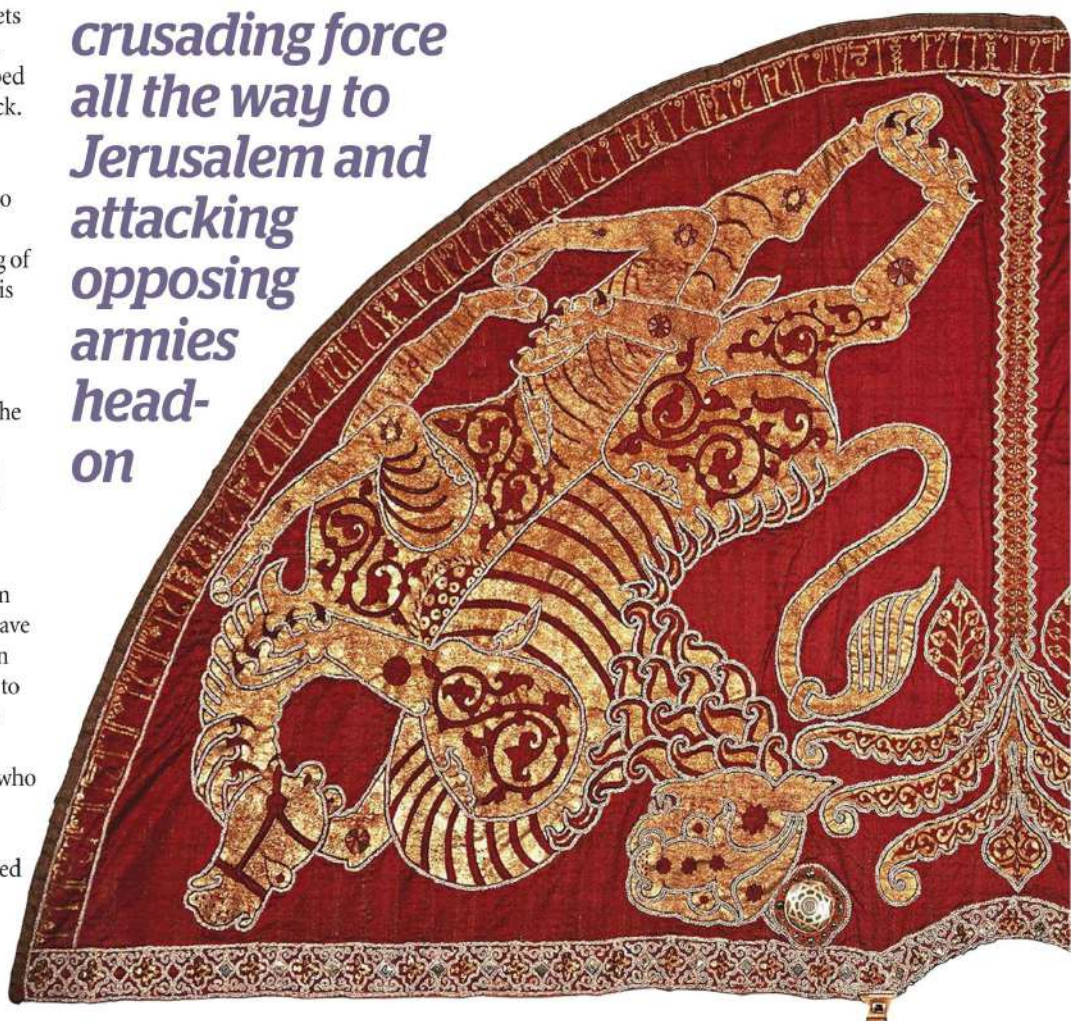
Robert proved to be an excellent warrior, staying with the main crusading force all the way to Jerusalem and attacking opposing armies head-on

midlands. The north was a tougher nut to crack, but over time the Normans penetrated the whole of the region south of the Solway and Tweed.

The situation in Italy presented different challenges, but here too was the possibility of wealth. In southern Italy, Lombard princes competed with Byzantine and Holy Roman emperors and the pope, while Sicily was under Arab rule. There were contacts with northern Europe. Visitors included pilgrims to the famous shrine of St Michael at Monte Gargano in Apulia or on their way to Jerusalem, and it was pilgrims, according to one tradition about the arrival of the Normans, who first took up arms for a rebel leader against the Byzantine emperor.

Then different groups began to trickle south, fighting for those who would employ them. They were soldiers of fortune, men from the middling or lower ranks of the aristocracy who had been trained as warriors but for whatever reason, political disfavour or too many brothers to provide for, had taken the road south. In 1030 one of them, Rainulf, had been given Aversa, a newly founded town north of Naples, and his nephew Richard, who came from the neighbourhood of Dieppe, established a principality centred on Capua.

BRIDGEMAN



The most famous of the newcomers came from a village near Coutances in the west of Normandy, Hauteville-la-Guichard. These were the sons of Tancred de Hauteville. Tancred had married twice, and had no fewer than twelve sons, of whom several made their way to Italy. Two of the sons of the second marriage, Robert Guiscard, 'the wily one' and Roger (later Roger I of Sicily), achieved spectacular success. By dint of force and persuasion they began to extend their rule over Apulia and Calabria.

Pope Leo IX grew so alarmed at the threat that he gathered a coalition including forces of the Holy Roman emperor, Henry III. It went into battle against the Normans at Civitate in 1053. It was defeated and the pope was captured. From that time, although relations between papacy and Normans were sometimes fractious, both benefitted from their resulting alliance: the popes with support for extending their authority, and the Normans in the legitimisation of conquest in southern Italy and then Sicily.

In both areas, England and Italy, the Normans proved the capability of their forces on the battlefield, and both at Civitate and at Hastings used heavy armed cavalry – knights. They also used castles in the process of

extending their power. In the British Isles these took a variety of forms but at their simplest, earth and timber motte and bailey castles, they could be thrown up relatively quickly. At their grandest they were large and built in stone.

The Norman leaders were not prepared to restrict their territorial ambitions. In England William the Conqueror inherited claims to an imperial rule over the Welsh and Scots, later extended to Ireland. His followers showed little respect for the borders between English and Welsh territories, extending their rule in south Wales, along the valleys, and in the north.

In Scotland, William Rufus had the chance to intervene in support of the sons of Malcolm III and Queen Margaret, and then under David I Normans were granted large estates in Scotland. Later in the 12th century a Norman based in Wales, Richard FitzGilbert, married Aoife, daughter of the king of Leinster, and so entered a new theatre of military intervention.

Byzantine adventures

In Italy the experiences of Robert Guiscard and his brothers had brought them up against the Byzantine empire which, by the later 11th century, was also coming under increasing pressure from the east. By the 1080s Robert was

looking across the Adriatic to the Byzantine territory. He launched two naval expeditions, the first against Dyrrhachium (modern Durrës in Albania). He died during the second expedition, in 1085.

At a similar time, the Byzantine emperor, as a Christian, appealed to Rome for assistance against the Turks. In 1095 Pope Urban II preached the need for a crusade, a call which was answered by two groups of Normans, the first led by Robert II, Duke of Normandy, and the second by Bohemond of Taranto, a son of Robert Guiscard. The motives of the two leaders have often been contrasted. Duke Robert joined his kinsmen and neighbours in northern France on what many thought of as a perilous but pious pilgrimage. Bohemond was an opportunist who was already on the lookout for territorial gains at the expense of the emperor, Alexius Comnenus. In fact most crusaders joined for a mixture of motives, secular and religious.

Robert proved to be an excellent warrior, staying with the main crusading force all the way to Jerusalem and attacking opposing armies head-on. Bohemond was a leading figure at the siege of Antioch (now Antakya in southern Turkey), but he then refused to hand the great fortress over to the emperor on the grounds that Alexius had broken his promises. While Robert returned to Normandy, to defeat and lifelong imprisonment at his brother's hands, Bohemond went on to establish a principality centred on Antioch.

He was not the only crusader to create an independent lordship: Baldwin of Boulogne established the principality of Edessa in Turkey. Nor was Bohemond's subsequent career one of unalloyed success, for he was captured, and freed (it was said) by a Muslim princess. He evidently possessed great charisma, for when he returned to France in 1106, he married a daughter of the king of France, and we are told that many sought him as godfather for their sons, and that his name became common in France as a result.

So how far were all these exploits the work of Normans? The chroniclers who wrote about them constructed a concept of Norman identity which could be adapted to suit different circumstances. They were seen as a people, the inhabitants of Normandy, descendants of a Viking leader, Rollo, and his band. In practice, of course, the newcomers were outnumbered by the native Franks. Then in Italy, while the leaders were Normans, they remained few in number.

There were more Normans in the army of William the Conqueror, but again there was no mass migration from Normandy in the 11th or 12th centuries. The question of the strength of identity between Normans settled outside the duchy and Normandy



The magnificent coronation cape of Roger II of Sicily, the grandson of the Norman Tancred de Hauteville

Norman influence in Europe

They reshaped political geography and were a driving force in the crusades

1 London

It was already much the most important English city in the late 10th century when it became the headquarters of King Æthelred ('the unready'), whose kingdom faced repeated attacks by large and well organised expeditions from Denmark. These eventually succeeded in taking both the city and the kingdom. In 1066 the city did not immediately surrender to the Normans, but then decided to come to terms.

The Normans added to the Roman walls by constructing castles, of which the largest and most famous was the White Tower (Tower of London), built to impress. The city continued to grow as a centre of trade and commerce. The Norman kings based themselves outside the walls at Westminster, where a large palace was built near the abbey church, and where the court of the exchequer and the bench of justices came to be based in the 12th century.

2 Rouen

The city and surrounding territory was granted to Rollo in 911. He and his Vikings had been attacking in France, and the king of the west Franks was trying to ensure this group would become allies, instead of enemies. Rouen became the capital of Normandy, prospering as a place where Vikings could trade. It was held by Norman and Angevin kings of England until 1204, when it surrendered to King Philip Augustus of France.

3 Hauteville-la-Guichard

This small village, not far from Coutances, still proudly remembers its place in history as the ancestral home of the Hauteville family. From here the children of Tancred de Hauteville, a lord of modest standing with no fewer than twelve sons from two marriages, set out to make their fortunes in Italy.

4 Tarragona

In focusing on the main theatres of Norman action in the British Isles, Italy, and the Crusades, it is easy to forget just how widely Normans travelled to search for success in war. They took up arms for the Byzantine emperors, who were facing massive difficulties in Asia Minor, and they also went to Spain to fight the Muslims. One was a man named Robert Bordet, who took the city of Tarragona and held it between 1129 and 1146. While he went back to Normandy to recruit manpower, his wife Sibyl, "as brave as she was beautiful", occupied the battlements, a reminder that on occasion Norman women did go to war.

5 Civitate

The battle of Civitate, which took place near Foggia in 1053, was as decisive in the story of the Normans in Italy as Hastings was for the conquest of England. Pope Leo IX's coalition of German forces and Lombard princes was defeated by the Normans, including Richard Drengot count of Aversa, Humphrey of Hauteville and his brother Robert Guiscard. During the battle the pope stayed in the city of Civitella, but was captured afterwards. It was a turning point in the formation of the kingdom of south Italy and Sicily.



6 Hastings

The 1066 battle was unusual: it was very long and was decisive, delivering the kingdom to William. Most battles in the period were brief, as one side was either outnumbered or outclassed, but Hastings lasted from early morning until evening, when the English, having lost their leaders, King Harold and his brothers Gyrth and Leofwin, finally accepted defeat. It took place not at Hastings but inland at Battle. The general location is well known as William ordered an abbey to be built with its high altar on the site where King Harold fell. The battle was marvellously described on the Bayeux tapestry as well as in narratives and poetry.

King Harold, having learned of the landing of the Normans in Sussex, hurried south from his victory at Stamford Bridge east of York, and decided to take the risk of a battle. Had he won it was unlikely that the Normans would have been able to hold out in England, as the winter was approaching. He put up a stalwart defence, and for a long time the English line held out. In the event it was the Normans' use of archers rather than their knights which proved decisive in fatally wounding the king. Afterwards, although there were attempts to rally around Edgar, the 'Ætheling', with the fall of Harold and his brothers, the heart had gone out of the resistance. William was crowned king just weeks after the battle.

KEY

	Land under Norman control
	Holy Roman empire
	Byzantine empire
	Land under Muslim control

0 100 300 Miles

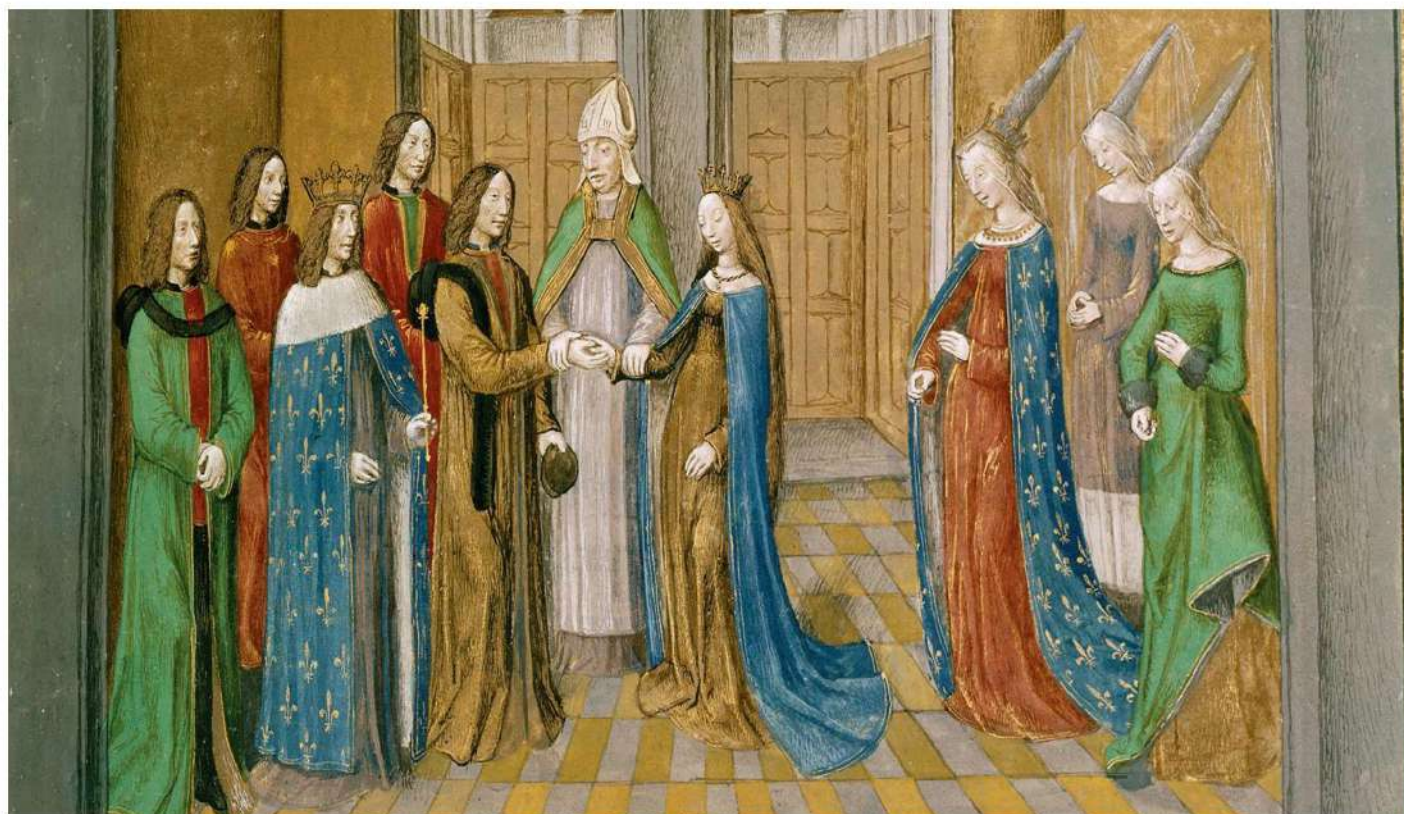
7 Jerusalem

To medieval people Jerusalem was a sacred city, and on maps is shown as centre of the world. Formerly part of the eastern Byzantine empire, by the late 11th century it was under Muslim rule. Byzantine emperors made appeals to popes for assistance and Pope Urban II, moved by stories of ill treatment of Christian pilgrims, preached the first crusade at Clermont in 1095. Those who took the cross, he said, would be pardoned their sins. Many, whether through fear of damnation, hope of gain, or solidarity with friends and neighbours, hurried to enlist. Among the leaders was Robert, who had succeeded his father William the Conqueror as Duke of the Normans and who brought with him a sizeable contingent, mainly from the duchy rather than from England.

In southern Italy Bohemond of Taranto took the cross in dramatic fashion by tearing a cloak into strips, using two to make a cross for himself and handing out the rest to his followers. The crusaders travelled to the Holy Land via Constantinople and, while Bohemond stayed at Antioch, Duke Robert went on to Jerusalem. The emotions of the crusaders when finally in sight of their goal are vividly described. What happened when they rampaged through the city, massacring thousands, was another matter. Nevertheless, they had achieved their aims and in this the Normans played a notable part.



MAP ILLUSTRATION BY PAUL HEWITT - WWW.BATTLEFIELD-DESIGN.CO.UK



Bohemond of Antioch, weds Constance, a daughter of the king of France in 1106. For Normans, marriage was a key way of making alliances

has been much debated in recent years. Some writers were obviously much more aware of a wider Norman diaspora than others. The early 12th-century chronicler Orderic Vitalis writing in Normandy, for instance, was particularly well informed about the Normans in Italy as well as in Normandy and England. On the other hand, those who wrote about the first crusade tended to describe the crusaders simply as Franks, without distinguishing the Normans.

Norman identity

So should these activities in different theatres be seen as part of a single, essentially Norman, enterprise? The question of identity depends on time and place: the description 'Norman invasion of Ireland' is still sometimes used of the late 12th-century intervention, though contemporaries tended to call the invaders 'the English'. The 12th-century rulers of Sicily were of Norman extraction, but the population was mixed. Latin, Greek, and Arabic were all in use.

King Roger II in particular was both able and cosmopolitan in outlook, and the royal court and its glittering culture drew elements from every quarter. The architecture of the cathedrals of Cefalù and Monreale, and the palaces in and around Palermo – the work of craftsmen skilled in both Byzantine and Arab techniques – speak volumes

about wealth and status, as they were intended to do.

A question I posed at the start of this article was about what seems to be the strong gender bias in Norman history. Was it all about men? In fact, women were crucial to the story of the Normans, usually as wives and mothers. Marriages were a key way of making alliances. Some of the early arrivals in Italy married into Lombard families, for instance. High-status women transmitted territory as heiresses and, as the mother of young sons, could act as regents.



Figure by a Lombard sculptor from the 11th century, when high-status women were crucial to the story of the Normans

Although this was undoubtedly a man's world, high status women were no mere spectators

So although this was a man's world, high status women were no mere spectators.

The Normans were more than brutally effective soldiers. They reshaped political geography both in Italy and in the British Isles. In Italy they created a united kingdom of South Italy and Sicily which lasted for centuries. By controlling Sicily they were able to send expeditions to north Africa, to access sub-Saharan gold, and to facilitate trade in the eastern Mediterranean and transport for the crusades. Greater contact with scholars familiar with Arabic and Greek texts enriched learning in both northern and southern Europe, to the benefit of philosophy, mathematics, and science.

In England the Norman Conquest caused a political and cultural reorientation away from the Scandinavian world. Although there remained a substantial number of families of Scandinavian descent, especially in eastern England, the ability of the Normans to resist Scandinavian expeditions meant that, in effect, the era of Viking attacks came to an end. Instead, the ruling elite in England came to be more closely linked with northern France.

The conquest of England also had profound consequences for England's relations with her neighbours in the British Isles, most immediately for Wales, then for Scotland and Ireland. Here, as in many other parts of Europe, the Normans were, above all, catalysts for change. **H**

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FEMALE POWER *behind the thrones*



A 20th-century illustration of Matilda of Flanders, wife of William the Conqueror. Her resources helped support his invasion of England

History tends to focus on kings, warriors and bishops – but a number of 11th-century women were hugely influential in war, state and church. **Leonie Hicks** introduces a quartet of powerful Norman women

Emma of Normandy is presented with the *Encomium Emmae Reginae* in an illustration contained in that 11th-century chronicle. Emma commissioned the book to paint her in a good light and help smooth over a tricky political situation



This article might best begin by paraphrasing a popular bon mot: 'behind every successful Norman man was a brilliant woman'. Here I will focus on four of them: Gunnor (c950–1031), Emma of Normandy (c985–1052), Matilda of Flanders (c1031–1083) and Sichelgaita (1040–1090).

We are fortunate that enough evidence survives from the 11th and 12th centuries to provide insights into the lives, activities and roles expected of the women who married Normans, or who were themselves Norman and married into other ruling houses. Chronicles such as the *History of the Normans* by Dudo of Saint-Quentin, and works by Orderic Vitalis, Amatus of Montecassino and Anna Comnena, furnish us with glimpses into how these women were regarded by their contemporaries.

In addition, charters, epitaphs and the remarkable *Encomium Emmae Reginae* – a lavishly illustrated document recounting events involving Cnut and his queen, Emma of Normandy – reveal how the women themselves might have wished to be remembered. Our knowledge of the lives of these women reflects the survival of the evidence, and also the Normans' experiences across Europe.

History records these women primarily because they married powerful men, forming politically significant unions. Gunnor's marriage to Duke Richard I of Normandy sometime after 968 helped consolidate ducal power at a time when his influence did not extend much beyond the area centred on Rouen in the east of the region. She was a member of another Danish kin group and helped strengthen connections between the competing groups of Scandinavian settlers.

Emma, daughter of Gunnor and Richard, sailed across the channel to marry Æthelred II (the 'Unready'), king of the English, in 1002. This was an alliance designed to secure peace at a time of renewed Viking attacks on the English coast; a previous treaty reveals that raiders had been finding shelter in Norman harbours. Following Æthelred's death in 1016, Emma married his successor by conquest, Cnut – and if she had any choice in the matter, it was almost certainly Hobson's choice.

Matilda brought to her marriage to Duke William II (later the Conqueror) allies on Normandy's eastern border, while Sichelgaita of Salerno, a Lombard princess, acted as a peace-weaver through her 1058 union with Robert Guiscard who had emerged as the leading Norman power in southern Italy in the second half of the 11th century.

Gunnor, Emma and Sichelgaita all married

men who had had previous wives and, in some cases, children. The fact that their sons were able to inherit is testament to their political acumen. For Gunnor and Matilda, the situation was fairly straightforward, and their numerous children played significant roles in the court and church, and through marriage, helping to bolster their families' power and influence.

Queenly qualities

Surviving evidence provides details of the qualities valued in noble women. Dudo of Saint-Quentin described Gunnor as being "fortified by an abundance of all good qualities". Prior to her marriage she had been Richard's concubine for several years; after the death of his first wife, his followers pressed him to formalise his union with Gunnor. Evidence presented in her favour said she was "born from magnificent stock, beautiful to look at and attractive, cautious and prudent in counsel, devoted in her feelings, disciplined in emotion, restrained in her advice, mild in her dealings with people, hard working and wise in all matters". She also had a very good memory, exploited by Dudo when writing during her widowhood. This paints a picture of a duchess who boasted much the same qualities as any male adviser in the ducal court.

In a charter for the abbey of Sainte-Trinité (La Trinité) in Caen, dating from after the conquest of England, Matilda is described as "the most noble of queens, the daughter of Baldwin, most energetic and famous count of Flanders, and the most famous niece of Henry, king of the French". There is a sense that Matilda's lineage was highly significant, both in terms of how she saw herself and also the lustre this added to her marriage. Her epitaph emphasises her double royalty, through descent and by marriage. William's reign as duke had begun uncertainly (he was only seven or eight when his father died on pilgrimage) and his illegitimate birth did not make for smooth succession. His marriage to Matilda (c1051/2) added legitimacy to his court.

The qualities valued in Gunnor and Matilda also found echoes in a brief description of Sichelgaita by Amatus of Montecassino: "she was of noble parentage, beautiful in body, and very wise". She was a daughter of the Salernitan royal house, so in marrying Robert formed an alliance between her brother and her husband in a region where competing factions fought for power. However, it was when Robert ousted her brother that his marriage to Sichelgaita really proved its worth. He had no claim to Salerno other than right of conquest, but his wife, with her birth connections, provided



Æthelred the Unready in a 14th-century manuscript. Emma of Normandy married Æthelred, then after his death wed his Danish successor, Cnut

Gunnor was 'born from magnificent stock, beautiful to look at and attractive... hard working and wise in all matters' – and also had a very good memory

necessary legitimacy and continuity to help smooth the transfer of power.

It was almost certainly for this same reason that Cnut married Emma. Following his assumption of the English throne in 1016 he sent for the dowager queen and married her. Though Norman rather than English, Emma provided continuity with the previous regime following a bloody conquest.

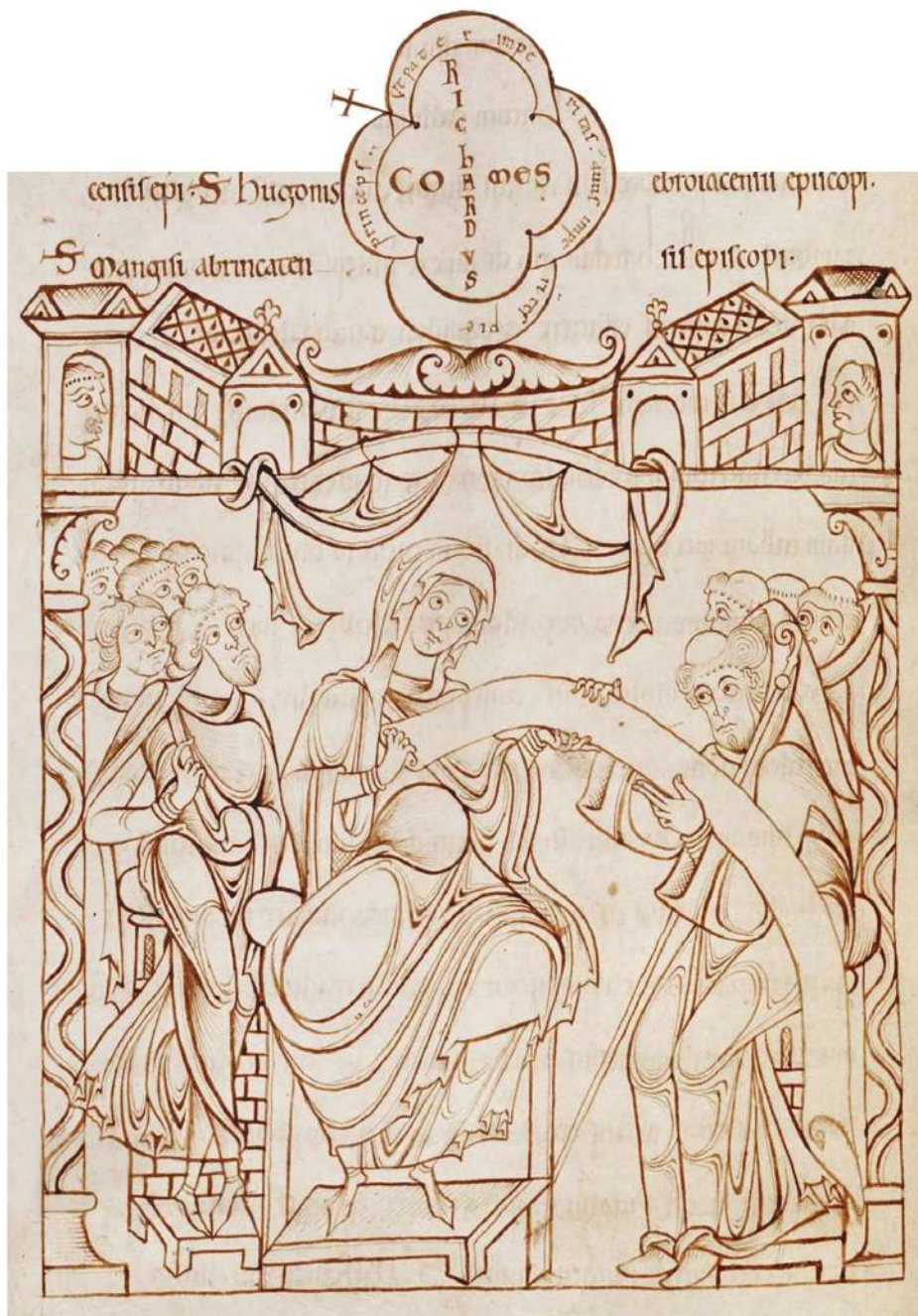
During their marriages, and subsequently as widows (with the exception of Matilda who predeceased her husband), these women exercised power in various ways. One of the most significant was through patronage, particularly of the church. This was not just a means of expressing piety and ensuring prayers for the souls of one's family and self but, crucially, as a way of imposing authority and making peace.

Gunnor held lands in the west of Normandy, particularly the Cotentin peninsula, an area that largely fell outside ducal control. One of the significant powers in the area was the abbey of Mont-Saint-Michel, traditionally under the protection of the dukes of Brittany. Gunnor made many gifts to the abbey, recorded in its 12th-century cartulary (collection of deeds or charters) along with a line drawing of the duchess handing over her charter to the monks. Though this is not a contemporary depiction, it demonstrates the importance of the gifts and marks a shift in the abbey's patronage, bringing it more firmly under Norman control.

Matilda of Flanders also exercised patronage as a way of bolstering authority. The great 12th-century chronicler Orderic Vitalis, writing at the monastery of Saint-Évroult in Normandy, records that, after the refoundation of the abbey, Matilda gave the monks "a costly chasuble and cape for the divine office and a hundred Rouen pounds for work on the refectory". This monastery lay in a contested area towards the southern border of the duchy, so grants from the ducal house acted as a marker of protection from potentially predatory local lords.

La Trinité, founded by Matilda, received gifts of land and money, and acted as an impetus to economic development in Caen – at the time, a new town and William's capital in the west of Normandy. In this La Trinité mirrored her husband William's monastery of Saint-Étienne, also in Caen.

Emma's gifts to churches during her marriage to Cnut were particularly significant in restoring peace and establishing confidence in her husband's position as a Christian ruler (Cnut's family had been Christian for only three generations). The English church was impoverished following the turbulence and taxations of Æthelred's reign and the Viking raids and conquests. Emma gifted vestments



Gunnor, duchess of Normandy, is shown making a donation to the abbey of Mont-Saint-Michel, in an illustration in the abbey's 12th-century cartulary

and altar cloths to the church at Ely, which housed the shrine of a significant Anglo-Saxon saint, Æthelthryth. Winchester, the royal capital of Wessex, also enjoyed her patronage, as did Canterbury, the mother church of the realm, founded by Saint Augustine. Such gifts of land, books, vestments and other liturgical paraphernalia went some way not only to restoring the glory of the church but also establishing the royal couple in traditions of Christian rulership.

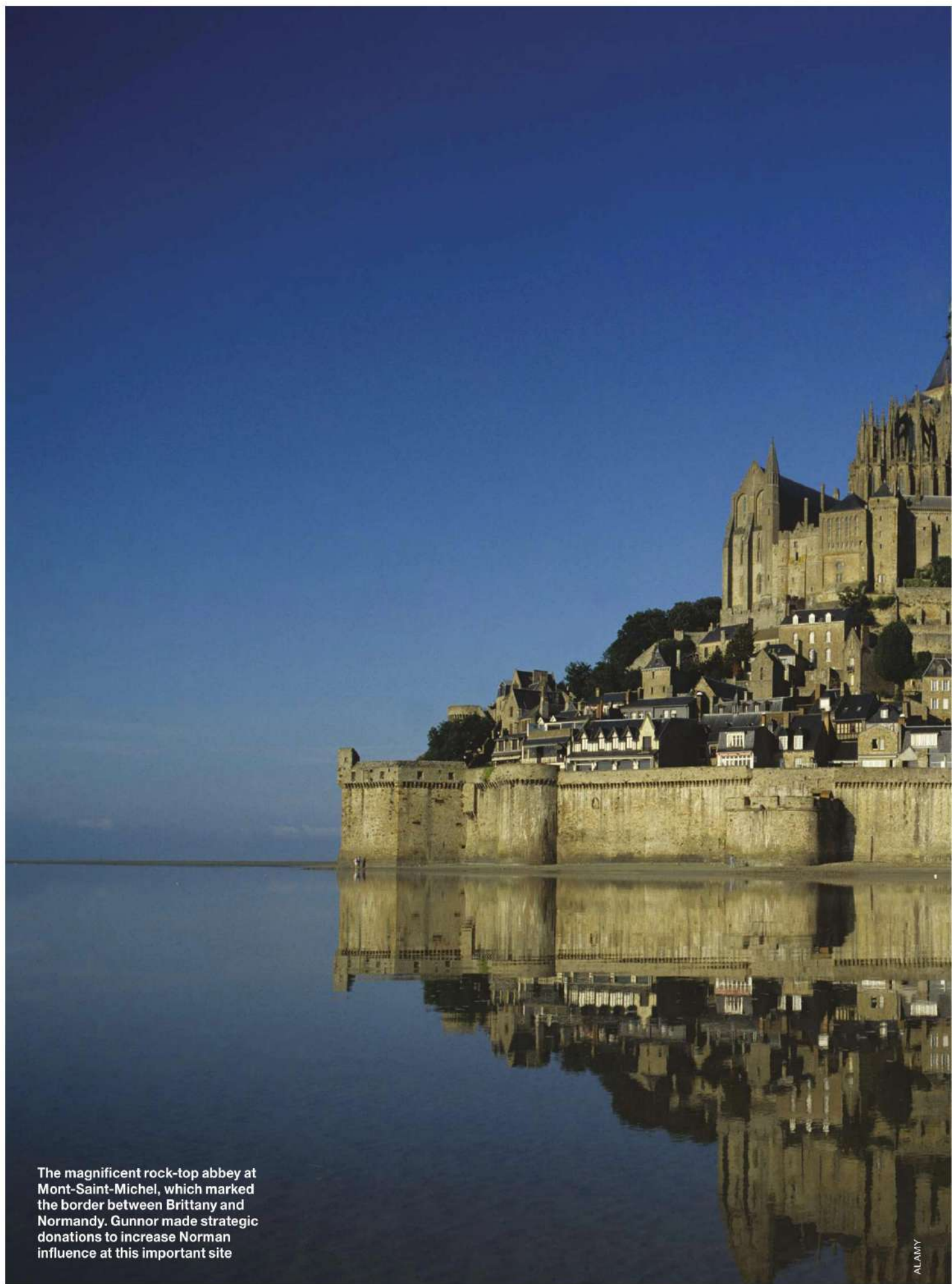
Royal relics

This activity was supported by one of Emma's more remarkable traits: she was a relic collector. She notably acquired the bodies of Saint Bartholemew and Saint Ouen, keeping parts for herself and donating the rest to Canterbury. This might seem rather grisly to modern sensibilities, but such relics were highly venerated and sought after. They could be the focus for private devotion or establish

a centre of pilgrimage, increasing the revenue and prestige of a particular church while gilding the memory of the patron.

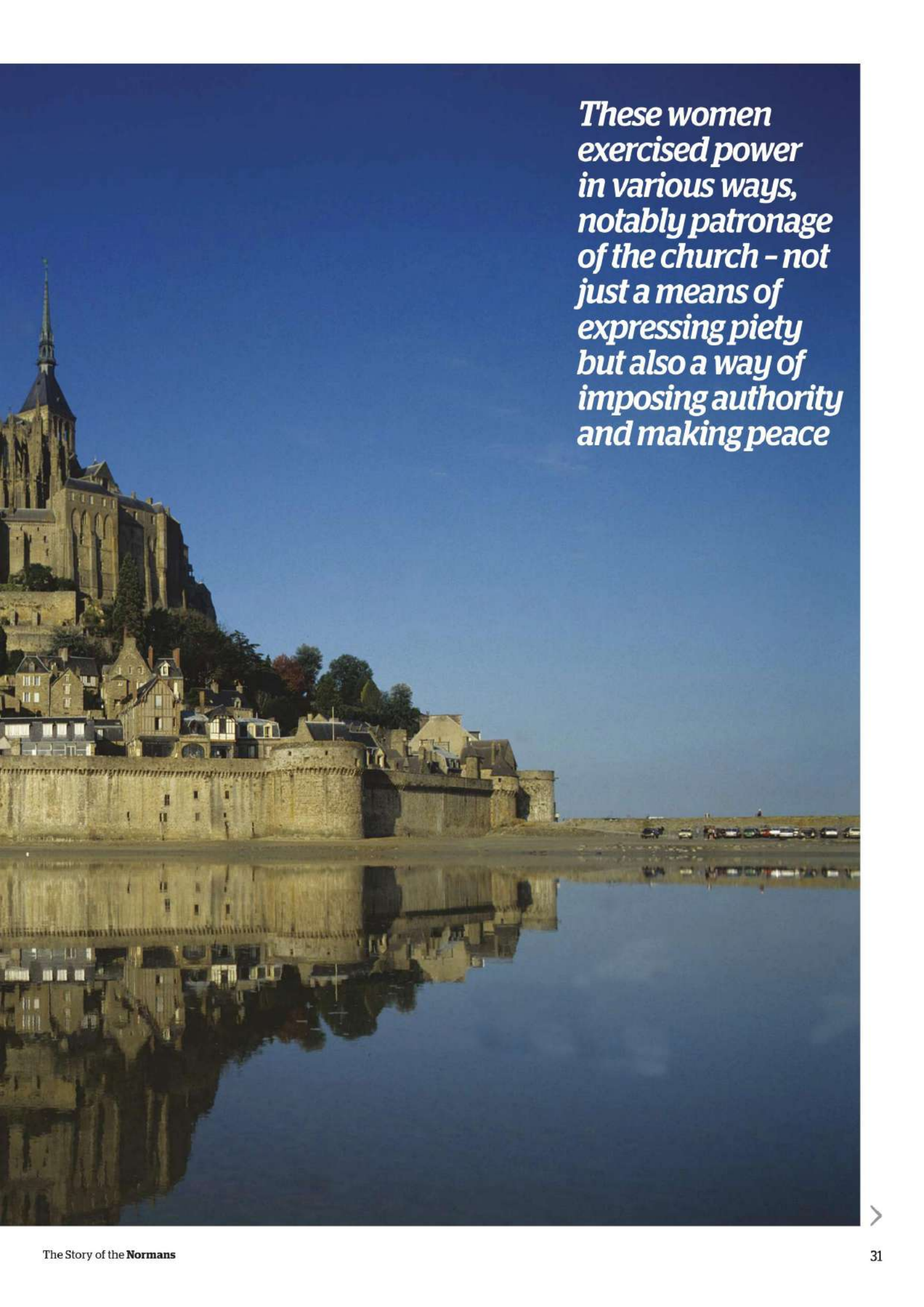
Emma's standing as a benefactor of the church is demonstrated in an illustration in the *Liber Vitae* of New Minster Winchester, the 'Book of Life' that commemorated its patrons. She and Cnut are shown presenting a cross to the altar, while above them Christ is enthroned in majesty, flanked by the Virgin Mary on his right and Saint Peter on his left. Mary and Emma share the distinction of being placed at Christ's right hand.

Sichelgaita's patronage of the important abbey of Montecassino alongside that of her husband also helped to restore the community's wealth and establish good relations between the church and the Normans; Robert and his family had previously despoiled the monastery's lands. Amatus records that, such was Sichelgaita's devotion to the abbey and to Abbot



The magnificent rock-top abbey at Mont-Saint-Michel, which marked the border between Brittany and Normandy. Gunnor made strategic donations to increase Norman influence at this important site

ALAMY



*These women
exercised power
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expressing piety
but also a way of
imposing authority
and making peace*



An 11th-century poem describes Gunnor as 'the leading person of the kingdom' - she continued to play a significant role in the government of Normandy well into her old age

King Cnut and Emma (called Ælfgifu in English sources) present a cross on the altar of the New Minster, shown in the *Liber Vitae* of New Minster Winchester. Such donations helped establish the Christian rulership of the couple in England

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Desiderius in particular, “she seemed more like a daughter to him”.

Evidence also survives demonstrating how these women acted in government and helped to administer justice. The survival of charters and writs – encompassing many of the decisions relating to law, gifts or transfers of land, or other matters – is patchy for this period. We do know, however, that these women all acted as witnesses or grantors at various stages during their careers.

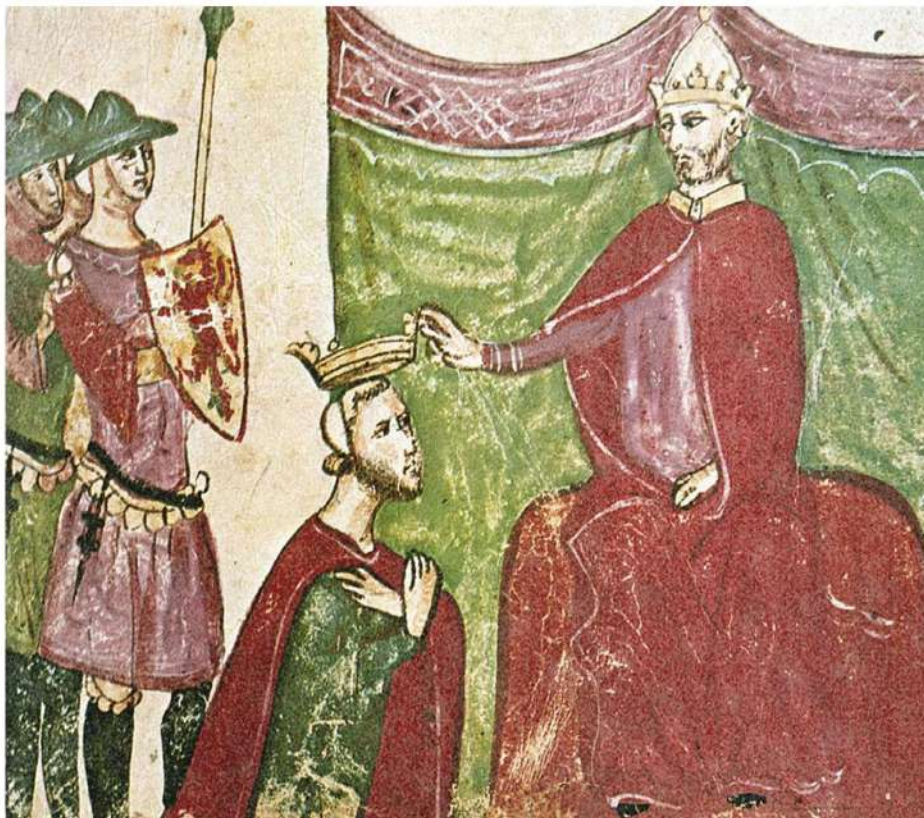
Sometimes these documents also cast light on the lives of other women not otherwise recorded. A charter from the abbey of Jumièges concerning a substituted child not only reveals Matilda and William acting together, but also how a widow by the name of Oringa was able to make money by renting another woman’s child to pass off as her own to continue receiving maintenance payments from the father.

Literary and chronicle evidence also sheds light on the women’s roles. A remarkable poem by Warner of Rouen from the early 11th century shows Gunnor in her widowhood as active at court and making decisions – specifically, to free the wife of the wandering enslaved poet Morihut. There is undoubtedly an element of flattery in Warner’s description of Gunnor as “the leading person of the kingdom”, but there is no doubting the fact that she played a significant role in the government of Normandy well into her old age.

One event in particular shows how a duchess could play an important part in her husband’s ambitions and the wider politics of her time: the conquest of England in 1066. A document from Fécamp, Normandy known as the ‘Ship List’ – a record of people who contributed to the fleet – shows that Matilda provided *Mora*, the duke’s flagship for the invasion fleet, and that “on its prow Matilda had fitted [a statue of] a child who with his right hand pointed to England and with his left hand held an ivory horn against his mouth”. The Bayeux tapestry shows this ship also carrying the papal banner granted by Alexander II, though the child is shown as being on the stern.

Other figures in the list included leading nobles who did not take part in the battle for various reasons, not least because they held lands in sensitive regions of Normandy, such as the borders, that needed protecting. One of those men, Roger of Montgomery, had acted as regent with Matilda during the duke’s campaigns. She thus played a significant role in the planning and success of the conquest.

Sichelgaita also seems to have played a significant role in Robert’s military activities. She accompanied him during the campaigns led by his brother Roger in Sicily against the Byzantine empire. This suggests that Robert valued his wife’s counsel and company.



A medieval miniature shows Pope Nicholas II investing Robert Guiscard as Duke of Apulia, Calabria and Sicily in 1059. Robert’s marriage to the noble Sichelgaita legitimised his rule

A remarkable illustration of the effect that she had on the army’s morale is provided by Anna Comnena, the 12th-century Byzantine princess who wrote a biography of her father, Alexius I. Anna noted that Sichelgaita travelled on campaign and “when she donned her armour [she] was indeed a formidable sight”. It does not matter whether or not she actually wore armour – though evidence from other chronicles suggests that women might well protect themselves in this way – but rather that she was demonstrating her position next to her husband in a very visible way: she identified wholly with his cause.

On another occasion she supposedly shamed the fleeing Normans into standing and fighting the Byzantine army by charging them with a spear. There is more than an element of poking fun at the Normans’ perceived cowardice in Anna’s account, but Sichelgaita herself emerges as formidable and indispensable.

In memoriam

Finally, these women all left behind indications of how they wanted to be remembered. Gunnor’s prodigious memory helped shape the very first history of the Normans, and her patronage of literary figures suggests some approval for the way she was portrayed.

Emma commissioned the *Encomium* to push her version of the events of the turbulent early to mid-11th century; it painted her as good company, generous to the poor, a supporter of widows and loved by her people.

Through the pen of Amatus, monk of Montecassino under Abbot Desiderius, so beloved of Sichelgaita, we get a sense of a woman who managed the conflicting expectations of her natal and marital families.

Matilda’s sense of identity is best expressed through her epitaph and gifts to La Trinité. The latter included personal items such as cases, but also “a chasuble [a priest’s garment] made at Winchester by the wife of Ealdred”, a cloak, two crosses on gold chains, a chain to hang up an altar lamp, candlesticks and, significantly, her royal regalia.

Additionally one of Matilda’s daughters, Cecilia, was given as an oblate to La Trinité, and later became its abbess. She was thus well-placed to ensure the continuation of her mother’s royal memory. **H**

Leonie Hicks is senior lecturer in medieval history at Canterbury Christ Church University

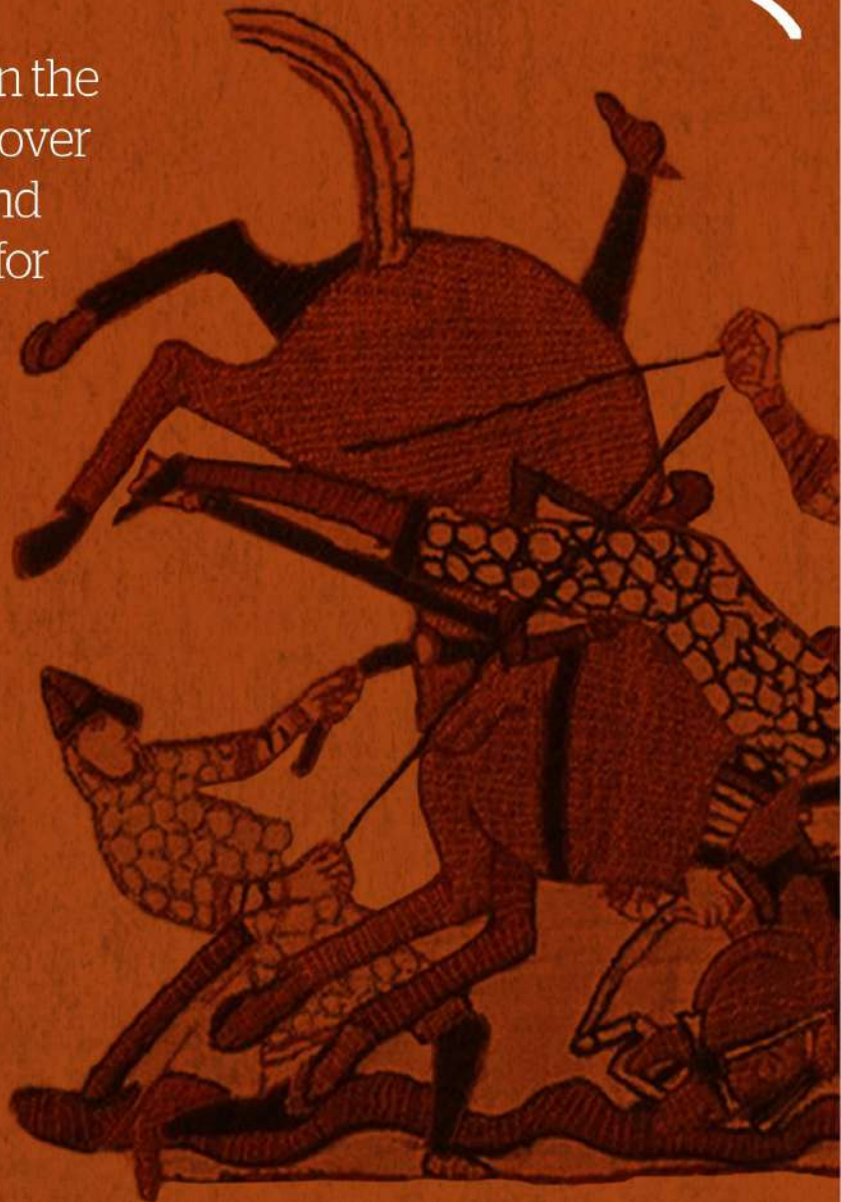
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BOOKS

- **A Short History of the Normans** by Leonie Hicks (IB Tauris, 2016)
- **Queen Emma and Queen Edith: Queenship and Women’s Power in Eleventh-Century England** by Pauline Stafford (Blackwell, 1997)
- **Memory and Gender in Medieval Europe 900–1200** by Elisabeth van Houts (Palgrave Macmillan, 1999)
- **The Normans in Europe (Manchester Medieval Sources)** by Elisabeth van Houts (Manchester University Press, 2000)

THE CONQ

Meet the key characters in the invasion drama, and discover how events in England and Normandy set the scene for the Conquest of 1066



UEST



DÉTAIL TAPISSERIE DE BAYEUX
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Peasants tending sheep in an illustration on vellum, c1030. In pre-Conquest England, land was increasingly coming into the hands of a landowning class to whom peasants paid rent and owed obligations

ENGLAND

Ryan Lavelle visits England in 1065 and finds a country undergoing change yet feeling the pull of its history

Let's imagine a group of visitors arriving in England in 1065. They might land in Dover, an old Roman port whose importance in the 11th century was marked by it being the first town on the first page of Domesday Book. Their reasons for coming could vary: our visitors might be traders, bringing luxury goods, such as silk, jewels or precious metal, wine or oil; they might be representatives of a church clutching charters and other manuscripts, hoping to return with ornate English examples or even the relics of saints. The visitors might be master

BRIDGEMAN



BEFORE 1066

stonemasons or architects versed in the new Romanesque style creeping into England; they might be ambassadors bearing gifts and a message from the court of a king or prince.

They might, of course, have hostile intent, but even though Norwegian and Norman invasions were just a year away in 1065, and Viking raids were still occasionally visited on English shores, let's not worry about that for the moment. Much of the English kingdom was, barring the odd flare-up, quite a peaceful place during the last year of the reign of Edward the Confessor.

Our group of visitors would get an immediate impression of links between

England and its neighbours from the sight of chunky-hulled trading ships, with skeleton crews and large single sails, which plied their trade back and forth across the 'South Sea' (as the Anglo-Saxons knew the Channel) and North Sea, using Dover and dozens of other towns dotted along the English coastline. If they arrived in late autumn, our visitors would be unlikely to miss the smell of the haul of herrings, whose season from 29 September to 30 November was protected in Dover by the declaration of the king's peace.

A visitor might normally hope to get lodging in a town, but as Eustace, Count of Boulogne, brother-in-law of the king, had

found to his cost in 1051, one could not always demand it. The townspeople had taken offence to Eustace's imperious demand and during the ensuing fracas people were killed on both sides and property was damaged. But, raw as memories might still be, any destruction was likely to have been made good in a prosperous town like Dover by 1065. Urban life was on the way up in the 11th century.

Towns had grown in England from their post-Roman origins as seats (cathedrae) of bishops and their later developments as spurts of defensive investment against Viking threats. A flourishing economy had overtaken both of these urban purposes, giving town life

Sýþþan pær fepþuðaðæz pharaones gebýrðad. þarophte he mi-
celne beofurcipe his cnihtum. gemang þam dagþohte he þæra
býrila ealdor. 7 þær abæcer gila. 7 he ge fette þær abýrila ma sýrter
to þære nōt þe he ær hæfde. þone oþerne he hēthōn. on gealtan. Ða
pær ioreper forfæst nýs afandod 7 þeah h pæþerne þær abýrila
ealdor for gear ioreper ærende.



After þam gearum pharaomætte þæthēstode be anre ea. 7 him
puhte þæthēge rāpe gān up of þam flode reofon fæstpe oðan 7 ippe
fætte. 7 him an lærude on morigum lande. him puhte eac þæt
hēge rāpe cūman oþre reofon oðan up of þære ea. þa pæsonfule
7 ipide hlāne. 7 hieodon be þære ea of þam on gnenum reofum 7 a
biton þa fætte oðan 7 fæton hi. Ða apoc fapao 7 fep eft.
7 hine mætte oþer rāpēn. Him puhte þæthēge rāpe reofon
eān peaxan on anum healmē. fülle. 7 fægepe. 7 hēge reah
oþre reofon. lyppe 7 for fepuncene. Ða fæton ealle þa fæge
pan. Ða apoc pharaom of fæpe.

Sciendū qđ añ morte ysaac xii. annis uedū ē iol

Pharaoh has his baker hanged in an 11th-century illustration of the story of Joseph.
This depiction may reflect something of the Anglo-Saxon artists' sense of rulership and justice

an importance of its own. Places such as Dover were often surrounded by walls and were defined by them, but the experience of town life lay in street patterns formed by mostly timber and lath houses. Some of these were roughly built and densely packed, others were urban versions of country manors, providing high-status *pieds-à-terre* for nobles and royals.

Churches, generally made of stone by the 11th century, served different parish communities within towns, and the sprawl of settlement could easily spread to areas outside walls, with the route to and from many towns seeing little clusters of suburban occupation, often with their own characteristics.

Though many of the people living in suburban zones might be among the poorer people of town communities – the wretched and disenfranchised who had not quite benefited from the uneven distribution of wealth in a buoyant economy (in earlier decades they had included refugees from the countryside) – England as a whole was rich in the 11th century. That wealth was why the kingdom had been invaded by two large Viking armies in the early decades of that century, but the ability to turn goods into gold (or here, silver) had not been dulled by the violence of those centuries.

Squeezing golden geese

Connections with Scandinavia remained important even after England ceased to be part of an Anglo-Scandinavian empire in 1042. But trade between England and the Continent seems to have operated most effectively through connections to the German empire, with whom a single trade agreement system operated (rather than going through the various French princes, who each exacted tolls as goods moved through their territory). This allowed the exchange of goods, particularly finished and part-finished English woollen cloth, for newly-mined German silver.

The availability of silver meant a high standard for English coins, allowing enviable economic stability. Although not all historians are convinced about the extent to which the 'state' could reach into the lives of ordinary folk, the ability to tax was one of those ways in which we see the late Anglo-Saxon 'state' in operation. This wasn't just the rapacious seizure of wealth by 'robber barons' but was as much about the taking of taxes regularly according to an ability to pay. Although far from progressive taxation, such taxes meant that a king could squeeze golden eggs from his goose without throttling it. The Domesday survey, popularly held to be a Norman



Edward the Confessor, pictured on a silver penny. His kingdom was generally wealthy in the 11th century, through land taxes and successful trade with the Continent

The availability of silver meant a high standard for English coins, allowing enviable economic stability

achievement, was in fact only possible because an infrastructure existed in pre-Conquest England – the shires, the hundreds and the men of those communities who answered to royal agents – which Norman conquerors were able to put to their own ends (see the article on the Domesday survey on page 98).

The reaches of the kingdom were also apparent in the idea of law and order. Much of England was closely governed, if not always well governed, in 1065. The limits of law were still determined by the extent of the conquest of the kingdom by the West Saxon dynasty of Alfred the Great in the preceding century, and 'Danish' law prevailed where the Danish conquerors had been long settled. Further north, where settlement was sparser, Northumbrian earls ruled by compromise and occasional consent. In much of the kingdom, however, justice was something closely linked to the idea of kingship.

Sometimes this could be seen. If our group

of visitors had church business and travelled the few miles out of Dover to Canterbury, they might be privileged enough to gaze upon an 11th-century Anglo-Saxon version of the Hexateuch, the first six books of the Old Testament. Its story of Joseph would have informed them, as it informs us, of an English sense of how a king's authority worked. One folio, its inks as vibrant today as they were when readers gazed upon it a millennium ago, shows a minor episode in the story, Pharaoh's hanging of his baker, and provides a representation of Pharaoh as an Anglo-Saxon king. The ruler presides over his council, the *witan*, and the judicial execution. In focusing on this episode, rather than on Joseph, it is almost as if the artists have momentarily forgotten where the story should be going in order to present the majesty of rulership alongside the visceral reality of justice.

Perhaps the experience of town life had reminded the artists and their audience of what justice really meant to the Anglo-Saxons. Royal officials displayed the bodies and particularly heads of those who had been executed, so those approaching an important town, perhaps looking up to its ramparts, would find it hard to ignore the rotting bodies of those who had been judged and found wanting. This was not simply the politics of fear, but came from a strong idea of the authority of kings stemming from God himself. The consent of those who submitted to the king, whether he were Edward the Confessor or even his short-lived successor Harold Godwinson, lay in the idea of that God-given authority.

Countryside in change

This political community provided a sense of belonging that extended beyond urban centres and, in some ways, it was here in the countryside – where the vast majority of the 1.5 million or so inhabitants of England lived – that we really get a sense of the kingdom in the 11th century. The communities to which people belonged had grown considerably since the early days of the first Anglo-Saxon settlements in the 5th and 6th centuries.

As they made their way inland using the networks of roads – some old Roman roads, some newly constructed through the public obligations associated with land-holding – our visitors might get a sense of a countryside in change. The sight of a parish church would be a regular occurrence on a journey and many of these would probably feel quite new albeit not entirely novel, perhaps in the manner that a later onlooker might recognise the extent of Victorian



A 13th-century illumination of Edward's burial. Harold Godwinson, already England's most powerful, wealthiest man, claimed the king named him as successor

The rise of the Godwins

A family, defined by political rivalry, that briefly became royalty

Having been in exile for much of his adult life, Edward the Confessor returned to England in 1041 to find Earl Godwin of Wessex and his family elevated to a powerful position in the kingdom during the reigns of Harold Harefoot (1037–40) and Harthacnut (1040–42), the sons of Cnut, the Dane who had wrested the kingdom from Edward's half-brother, Edmund II 'Ironside', in 1016.

With the Godwin family and other noble families having effectively sewn up the kingdom during the period in which England was part of an Anglo-Danish empire, Edward had few opportunities to develop links with the existing English nobility, particularly as Godwin had strong links with Wessex, in the heart of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom.

Although marriage to Godwin's daughter Edith might have been a means of securing links between the king and Godwin, the king turned instead to the patronage of the church and to bringing in supporters from Continental Europe, particularly Normandy, where he had spent much time in the court of the Norman dukes.

A vacancy for the archbishopric of Canterbury, to which Edward appointed a Norman churchman, ratcheted up tension and when Edward invited his brother-in-law, Eustace, Count of Boulogne, to England in 1051, Godwin supported those in Dover, his town, who had fought the hapless count, when he should have been meting out justice as the

king's agent. A refusal to meet with the king meant that Godwin and his family went into exile, and the king, eager to take advantage of the situation, sent his wife to a nunnery and shared out the Godwins' territories.

Godwin and his sons launched what was basically a Viking campaign in 1052, attacking the land of the king and his supporters and clearly showing their wish to return from exile. A stand-off followed and the nobility of the kingdom counselled caution, pointing out that the kingdom would otherwise be open to their enemies. The Godwins, whose position in the kingdom was at stake, had won. Godwin's eldest surviving son, Harold, was to advance quickly to prominence after the earl's death in 1053 and, in the years that followed, his reputation would be made by campaigning in Wales.

Harold was famously to have a rivalry within his own family when his brother Tostig was deposed from the Northumbrian earldom in 1065, but problems arose from the fact that during the crisis of 1051–2, Edward had promised succession to the kingdom to William of Normandy.

Although William was not the only beneficiary of such a promise prior to (the childless) Edward's death on 5 January 1066, William may have been the most troublesome candidate because his claim had come directly from the rivalry between the king and his foremost earl.

churchbuilding as something of its time yet still rooted in a sense of timelessness.

Far from being unchanging, the 11th-century countryside itself was seeing land concentrated into the hands of landlords. Some of these landholders were institutions or great magnates, while some were simply local 'big men'. While those lords may not have been particularly interested in the details of the agricultural year, many had reeves (officials) who were able to exploit natural resources. Land was being organised according to its 'inland' and the rented 'outland', with the control of rights to wood pastures and access to water a priority.

There is much debate as to the pace at which changes took place in the countryside and whether it had started long before the tenth century, even as early as the eighth. However, the evidence of the emergence of parish church communities tied in with village life in the later tenth and 11th centuries, and the evidence of 'private' land in the hands of landlords, all points toward an indication that England was already moving on the path to change that is most often associated with the Norman Conquest itself.

Archaeologists have long been attuned to this process and there is good evidence of how these changes might be reflected in the lifestyles of lords, with small enclosures, 'burhs', in private hands before 1066. Old English speakers reserved the word 'castel' for sites occupied by outsiders to whom they were hostile, though such places were really just the same type of thing as hall enclosures. If our group of visitors travelled west from Kent into Sussex, they might have passed one such building complex, at Bishopstone. In its heyday, the residence at Bishopstone had a tower, a hall and a small church, and its successor in 1065 may have formed the core of a Conquest-era estate.

Slaves and free men

Much within the communities that our visiting group passed through would have told them of the local and regional focus of life and identity. People were members of village communities, which were beginning to identify as belonging to parishes. But the free men among them had legal obligation to the tithing (a group) of ten households as well as to the larger court of the hundred. Of course, this did not define everyone's obligations.

We should remember that there were many slaves in the 11th century and, though women weren't excluded from political life by gender alone, and widowhood could offer a degree of freedom, in a society where male status dominated, women's opportunities beyond the household were limited. Free men had obligations to lords, though, who might be likely to be the landlord of an estate, and those



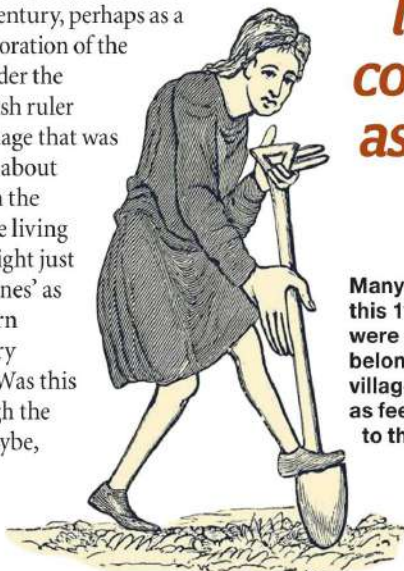
obligations extended to a duty of army service. This does not mean that our visitors would wander bewildered into a militarised countryside of armed warriors – for many, the duties of army service meant a readiness to supply the fighting aristocrats with what they needed to carry on the good life while on occasional campaign.

These twists, turns and overlaps of duty and identity could make for some complicated relationships, and a sense of 'national' identity could well have come low down the pecking order in the 11th century. What defined an 'English' man might be loyalty to his king, but the loyalty to an earl or an even more local lord could be just as important.

The idea of an 'Engla Land' was beginning to be more significant than a 'kingdom of the English' during the 11th century, perhaps as a result of the earlier incorporation of the territory into the areas under the control of the Anglo-Danish ruler Cnut. Although the language that was generally spoken was just about mutually intelligible from the Tyne to the Thames, those living in the former Danelaw might just as easily be defined as 'Danes' as English, even by a northern writer of the contemporary Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Was this a hostility that ran through the heart of the kingdom? Maybe,

St Andrew's at Bishopstone in East Sussex. This church has Anglo-Saxon origins and was once part of a larger building complex

What defined an 'English' man might be loyalty to his king, but the loyalty to an earl or an even more local lord could be just as important



Many working the land, as in this 11th-century image, were beginning to identify as belonging to their local village communities, as well as feeling their obligations to the lordship

though the 'Danish' identity of many in England was such that an English-born nobleman from Sussex, Harold, could bear the name of the son of a former Danish conqueror and could still hope to command enough support to raise him to the kingship in January 1066.

We began our visitors'-eye view of England with no real idea of why the visitors were here and we leave them none the wiser of their intentions. Our group may have left before the year's end, as plenty journeyed back and forth across the narrow seas, but perhaps some of the group remained, as others did, maybe even mastering the language. They may quickly have realised that they were encountering more than one single England and more than one idea of 'Englishness'. Far from rustic simplicity, it was a complex society. It was about to get more complicated. **II**

Ryan Lavelle is reader in early medieval history at the University of Winchester and co-editor of *Danes in Wessex: The Scandinavian Impact on Southern England, c800–c1100* (Oxbow Books, 2016)

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BOOKS

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THREE BATTLES THAT LOST ENGLAND

Having taken – by fair means or foul – the crown, Harold Godwinson's first and only year as England's king was derailed in three momentous battles. **Frank McLynn** leads us through the events that brought the Anglo-Saxon era to a traumatic end



Three battles, three kings:
1066 stands as England's most
dramatic year, as the contest for
the throne played out in two
months of brutal bloodshed



Gate Fulford 20 SEPTEMBER 1066

Disgruntled Tostig, ousted from his earldom, enlists Viking help to take back the north

The amazing drama of 1066 began 12 months earlier, when Edward the Confessor was in his final year as England's king. The power behind the throne was the Godwin family, with Harold Godwinson as would-be heir. Harold's ambitious brother Tostig was suddenly unseated as earl of Northumbria by a coup led by Edwin and Morcar of the house of Ælfgar, deadly rivals to the Godwins. Tostig appealed to Harold to use force to restore him, but Harold, fearing civil war, refused. The incandescent Tostig then sought allies elsewhere. His first stop was Normandy, where duke William promised help, but his plans were too slow for the ambitious Tostig, who next made his way to Norway.

There the king was 50-year-old Harald Hardrada, sometimes known as the last of the Vikings, who had ruled Norway for 20 years after a colourful career with the Varangian guard in Byzantium. Tostig pointed out that Harald had a claim to the English throne, through inheriting the right of succession the previous king, Magnus, had been given by Harthacnut, king of England 1040–42 (aka Knut III). Meanwhile, on the death of Edward the Confessor in January 1066, Harold Godwinson had himself crowned king – a clear case of usurpation, Tostig argued. At first Harald was reluctant to contemplate an English campaign, but was gradually persuaded by his young warriors' lust for adventure. He arranged to rendezvous with Tostig and his army of mercenaries in the Humber estuary in August 1066.

Harald sailed (slightly late) from Norway in 300 longships containing between 12,000 and 18,000 men. He picked up extra levies (troops) in the Shetlands and Orkneys and made the rendezvous with Tostig in the Humber estuary on 18 September. Edwin and Morcar prepared an army to confront the Norwegians, but made the mistake of wrongly guessing Hardrada's next move. Instead of penetrating deeply up the river Ouse, he and



Harald Hardrada depicted with an axe and a spear in St Magnus's cathedral in Kirkwall, Orkney

Hardrada's army, wielding giant axes, smashed through the English right as if it were plywood

Tostig anchored at Riccall, nine miles south of York. They then marched on York with about 6,000 warriors. At Fulford, two miles from York on the east bank of the Ouse, they saw clear signs that Edwin and Morcar intended to offer battle. The battlefield chosen was Gate Fulford, about half a mile from York.

The English army, of roughly equal numbers, was drawn up with their right flank resting on the river bank and their left bordering on marshlands. Hardrada saw that the battle would be decided at the riverine point, so deployed his crack troops there (that is, on his left), leaving Tostig and his Flemish mercenaries to form his right wing. Morcar attacked first on the marshland side and began pushing the Flemings back. Meanwhile the flower of Hardrada's army, uttering berserker cries and wielding giant axes, smashed through the English right as if it were matchsticks, then wheeled to deal with Morcar's momentarily victorious left and took it in the rear. The two wings of the English army rapidly lost contact. Soon the riverine wing of the Anglo-Saxons found itself under attack from three sides.

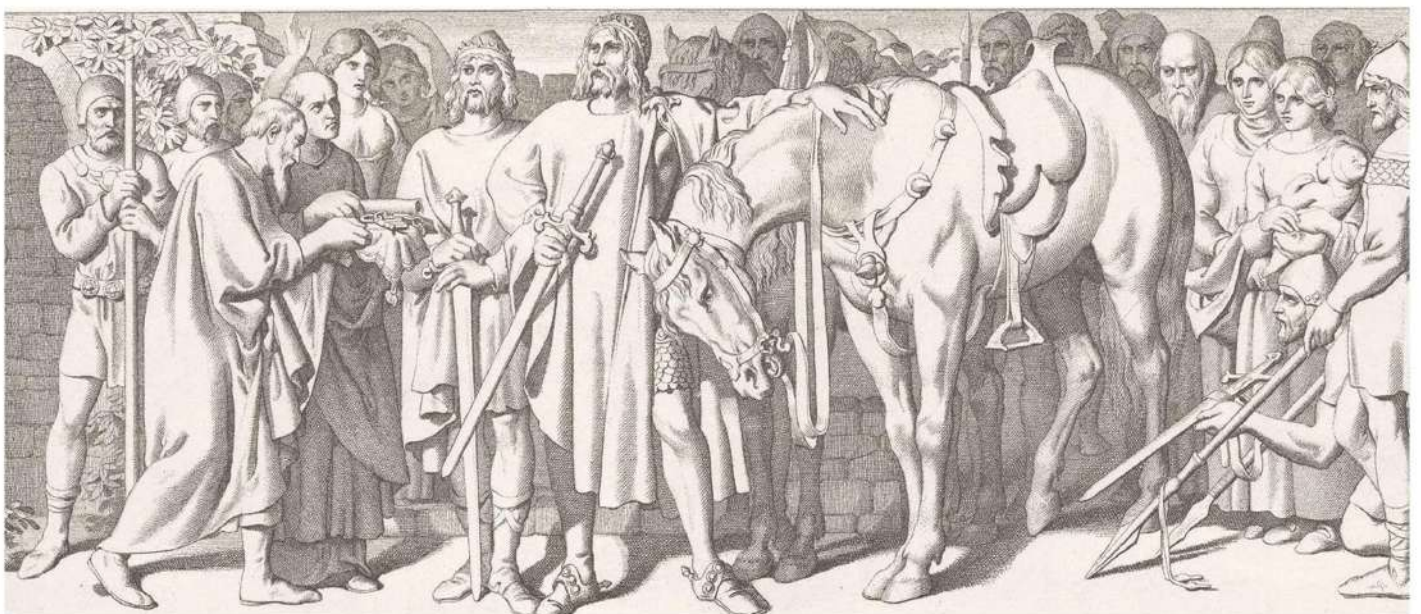
With their men being slaughtered in droves, Edwin and Morcar fled the battlefield. The English survivors broke and fled to York. Some attempted to swim across the Ouse but were drowned because of the swift currents. Those fleeing on the English left often found themselves trapped in bogs or sucked down into quicksands. It was said that the loss of life on the battlefield was so great that the Norwegians were able to march over impacted corpses as if on a solid causeway. York surrendered on 24 September. Tostig managed to persuade Hardrada not to sack it, as he looked forward to his restoration there. The surrender was negotiated on the basis of no looting by the Vikings; hostages were exchanged to seal the bargain. The wider surrender of Yorkshire was also offered, with the rendezvous point for hostages to seal that compact being agreed as Stamford Bridge, seven miles east of York.



A 19th-century engraving of Tostig persuading King Sweyn II of Denmark and King Harald Hardrada of Norway to take up arms for his cause



Attacked from three sides and their forces routed by the huge Norwegian army, earls Edwin and Morcar are forced to retreat from the battle



Tostig and Harald receive the surrender of York on 24 September; they forego looting the city as Tostig anticipates the return of his earldom

Stamford Bridge 25 SEPTEMBER 1066


Victory is shortlived as a surprise attack by Harold II decimates his brother's uprising

In London, Harold Godwinson received news of the Norwegian invasion and victory at Gate Fulford with consternation. His position as king had been challenged by William of Normandy, who claimed that he had been offered the succession by Edward the Confessor and threatened to take what was rightfully his by force. All summer, Harold had been concentrating on the invasion force being assembled in northern France by Duke William of Normandy, which he (rightly) saw as the main threat. William had been playing cat-and-mouse by assembling his army at Dives, then shifting it farther up the coast, keeping Harold guessing about his intended crossing point. Now Harold made the first of his many

grievous errors this year. He calculated that he might still have time to reach York by forced marches, take the Norwegians by surprise, defeat them and return south to deal with William. It was a wrongheaded decision. The forced march itself was a marvel, for Harold travelled 185 miles with his army in just four days. He had heard of the arrangements to exchange hostages at Stamford Bridge and planned to surprise the Norwegians there.

Meanwhile Harald Hardrada, basking in his great victory at Gate Fulford, had grown overconfident. The weather was swelteringly hot and the trek from Riccall to Stamford Bridge was a long one, so he decreed that his warriors should not wear armour on the march and need only take swords, axes and

spears with them; nearly all their shields were left behind. Even worse, thinking he had no enemy to contend with, he decided to take only about a third of his army with him – some 5,000 men. The rest of his force he left behind under his able commander Eystein Orri. At Stamford Bridge itself, some of the Vikings crossed the bridge to collect cattle on the west bank of the Derwent. Suddenly a great cloud of dust was seen. It was Harold Godwinson and his army, approaching the bridge from Gate Helmsley on the west bank. Hardrada was stupefied, but he had only himself to blame; his military intelligence was non-existent and he had not even sent out scouts along the road to Gate Helmsley. Sensing the deadly danger, Tostig advised a rearguard holding action on the run while



Hardrada's forces, emboldened by their win, are caught by surprise. Underpowered and under-armed, they fight ferociously but are all but wiped out by Harold's army (as depicted in a 19th-century painting)

Hardrada, basking in his great victory at Gate Fulford, had grown over-confident and decreed that his warriors should not wear armour

they retreated posthaste to Riccall. Hardrada refused, but compromised to the extent of sending couriers back to Riccall, telling Eystein Orri to come with all speed.

The ensuing battle had four main phases. In the first, the English massacred all the Norwegians on the west bank of the Derwent who did not manage to flee back across the bridge. They themselves were then held up for a long time by heroic Viking defence of the bridge itself. A giant axe-wielding berserker is said to have killed 40 Englishmen and was finally dispatched only when an intrepid Anglo-Saxon commando floated under the bridge on a barrel and thrust a pike upwards through the slats of the bridge.

The last stand

Once on the other side of the bridge, the Anglo-Saxons concentrated on the defensive circle formed by Hardrada on the small hill of High Catton. Furious hand-to-hand combat ensued, sword against sword, axe against axe. But without shields and armour, the Norsemen stood little chance and were cut

down in their hundreds. In this second phase of the battle, Hardrada was killed with an arrow through his windpipe. Tostig announced that he would continue to carry Hardrada's standard and the Norwegians roared their approval for a last stand. More bloody combat was the result. Soon Tostig and all luminaries in Hardrada's army were dead.

The English scythed down the enemy in hundreds, driving many to drown in the Derwent, but the victory was costly. Finally, no one was left of the valiant 5,000. But the English were left in command of the battlefield for only a few minutes before the final phase of the battle. Suddenly Eystein Orri and his men were upon them, having marched 18 miles on the double in full armour in blistering heat.

Exhausted though they were, the Vikings gave a good account of themselves. Their initial charge came close to breaking the English, but gradually numbers told.

Eystein Orri and all his captains died; some of the rank and file managed to slink away. Harold had won a great victory but had taken grievous losses himself. The Norwegians, crippled for a generation by this disaster, agreed a truce on condition that they left England at once. The truce was signed by Hardrada's 16-year-old son Olaf, who had remained at Riccall, obedient to his father's orders. So great was the disaster for the Vikings that of 300 ships that had set out on Hardrada's great adventure, only 24 returned to Norway.



Reenactors recreate the moment William's invading soldiers land, unopposed, in Pevensey, East Sussex



Hastings 14 OCTOBER 1066

Timing is all as Harold, weakened by his defence of the north, squares up to the Normans

While Harold was away in the north, duke William and the Normans landed unopposed at Pevensey on 28 September. Harold reached London on 6 October, having taken eight days to retrace the 190 miles from York. He immediately opted for the soonest possible battle with William – his most calamitous decision of the entire year. Pride and arrogance made him ignore the sage advice of his brother Gyrth, the wisest of the Anglo-Saxons. Gyrth argued that Harold should avoid confrontation until all his reinforcements had come in, including the force he had left behind with Edwin and Morcar, and then confront William with an invincible host.

William was gambling on a quick victory and lacked the resources to overcome a united Anglo-Saxon England if its full power was

properly deployed. Harold was adamant that he was going to seek an early battle, even though the heavy casualties in the northern campaign meant that he was short of housecarls – his crack troops and the only truly reliable fighters.

Even worse, Harold insisted that Gyrth, his other brother Leofwine and the great and good of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy accompany him on the march to Kent. This meant that if Harold lost the battle, England would be without credible leaders. Harold's decision to march to Hastings was folly of the worst kind, at every conceivable level.

The two armies confronted each other on the morning of 14 October. Harold set up his standard on Senlac Hill (modern Battle), seven miles north-west of Hastings. His tactics were to await the Norman onslaught and repel successive attacks on his shieldwall

until he sensed the pulse of enemy attacks weaken, when he would order a general advance down the hill. The battle began at 9am and lasted until dusk at 5.30pm. Both armies were about 7,000 strong, with the Normans probably having a slight numerical edge. Harold's weakness was his shortage of housecarls, which meant that conscripted levies (the *fyrð*) were overrepresented in his army. He also lacked a cavalry arm, restricting his tactical possibilities.

William used a conventional battle order, with Normans in the centre, Bretons and men from western France on the left and recruits from France, Picardy, Flanders and Boulogne on the right. His tactic was to weaken the enemy with a fusillade of arrows, then send in the infantry to break up the shieldwall and finally to order in the cavalry for the coup de grâce.



At first his tactics went awry. Archery proved unavailing, as the arrows, shot uphill, either overshot their target or bounced off the shieldwall. The attack by infantry failed dismally, as did a somewhat desperate uphill charge by the heavy cavalry. Harold ordered the advance. Normans were fleeing in all directions, and the day seemed won. Suddenly the advance stopped. It seems that pockets of Normans, encouraged by William, rallied and in one of the mini battles that followed Leofwine was killed. This had a disconcerting impact on Harold, who lost concentration. The pause gave William time to steady his troops. Harold retreated to the top of the hill and sustained another Norman assault. This

was probably the bloodiest part of the entire battle, and in this phase, although the shieldwall held and the Normans were once again driven off, Gyrth was killed.

Options run out

It was now around 2pm and both sides paused for rest and food. Harold had lost many of his best housecarls and using the fyrd soldiers to guard the outlying approaches to the hilltop proved costly. Their indiscipline allowed the Normans to stage feigned retreats and pick off the English as they foolishly rushed from their positions in pursuit. The Normans gradually gained possession of all the vantage points and Harold's situation began to look desperate; only

dusk and the advent of reinforcements could save him now. Finally, the shieldwall was breached. There was more bloody fighting of frenetic intensity and Harold himself fell shortly before nightfall (the story that he was killed by an arrow in the eye rests on no good foundation). On the death of their leader, the English broke and fled. There was one parting shot when they lured pursuing Norman cavalry into the Malfosse (a concealed ravine), leading to the deaths many Norman horsemen, but by full nightfall William was in possession of the field and victory was his.

The battle was one of the bloodiest in medieval history. Some 4,000 Anglo-Saxons died and 2,500 Normans (well over one-third of all combatants). It was also one of the most decisive. As Gyrth had foreseen, there was now no one to lead an immediate Anglo-Saxon resistance. William was crowned king in Westminster Abbey on Christmas Day 1066. **H**

Harold was adamant that he was going to seek an early battle. His decision to march to Hastings was folly of the worst kind, at every conceivable level

Frank McLynn is a historian and journalist whose many books include *1066: The Year of the Three Battles* (Pimlico, 1999)

BAYEUX UN



RAVELLED



It is the most significant and widely studied record of the tumult of 1066, yet its threads still hold mysteries for the modern historian.

Gale R Owen-Crocker unravels the stories behind some of the tapestry's key scenes

On 14 October 1066, the Normans triumphed at the battle of Hastings. In doing so they wiped out many men of the ruling class of Anglo-Scandinavian England, and through the subsequent Conquest they brought drastic changes, including in the ownership of land, organisation of the church and language.

Events leading up to the battle, and the conflict itself, are depicted in the Bayeux tapestry, a 68-metre-long embroidered frieze probably made within 20 years of the Conquest. The largest surviving non-architectural artefact from the Middle Ages, the tapestry tells the story as a conflict between two powerful rivals for the English throne: Harold II, the last Anglo-Saxon king, and William, duke of Normandy.

Surprisingly, since the tapestry largely reflects the viewpoint of Norman historians, the narrative begins with King Edward and Harold, about two years before the battle. Since

the last part of the tapestry is lost, its story now also ends with Harold, killed on the battlefield, after which the English flee. Perhaps originally William reappeared, possibly for his coronation in London on Christmas Day 1066, thus balancing the opening scene of King Edward enthroned. The tapestry has many such anticipations and echoes.

The Bayeux tapestry was probably designed in England, since several scenes are copied from illuminated manuscripts in the libraries of St Augustine's Abbey and Christ Church Cathedral, Canterbury. It may also have been made in England, since English embroidery was already prestigious. It has been in Bayeux since at least 1476, when it was being used as a hanging in Bayeux cathedral once a year. The likely connection that took it from Canterbury to Bayeux is Odo, half-brother of William. He was both Earl of Kent and Bishop of Bayeux.

Despite the attention it has received, the tapestry still presents puzzles. Here we will examine three scenes and three longer sections and discuss the questions they raise.

Harold says farewell to King Edward

What was the aged ruler saying to the future king?

The opening scene depicts Edward the Confessor, **1** a mature ruler (he was about 61 in 1064) of a wealthy kingdom: his clothes are gold-trimmed and his palace grand. The man facing him, evidently taking leave of the king, is probably his brother-in-law and most powerful subject, Earl Harold Godwinson **2**, and the next scene (not shown here) names him setting off on a journey. We are not told where Harold intended to go, nor why. Is the king's finger-to-finger gesture **3** one of support or disagreement? Is Harold heading for Normandy, taking a message from King Edward to confirm that Duke William is his designated heir; or to attempt to recover his brother and nephew who have been held hostage in Normandy since 1051? Perhaps, though, he is simply setting off on a hunting trip, since he takes hounds and a hawk with him (shown in subsequent scenes).



The Ponthieu digression

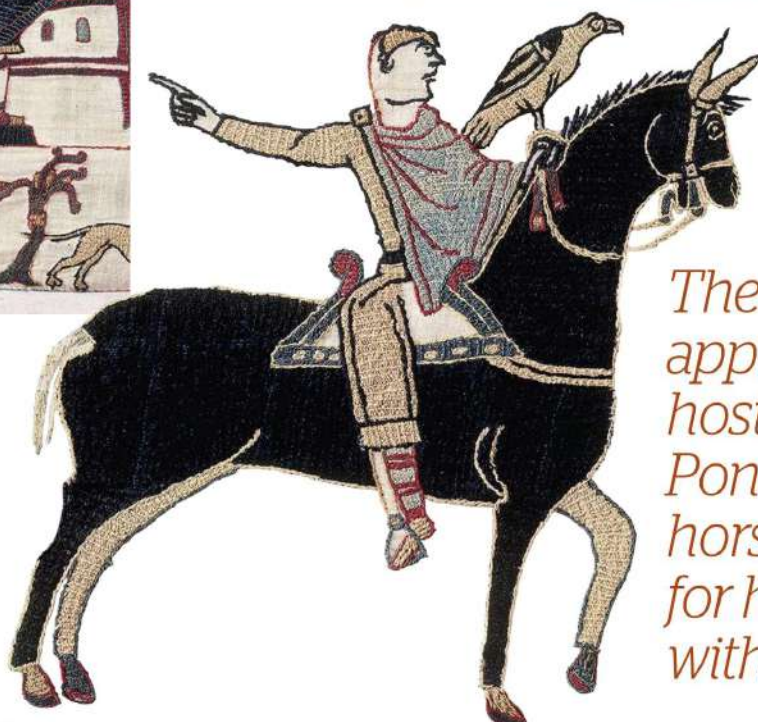
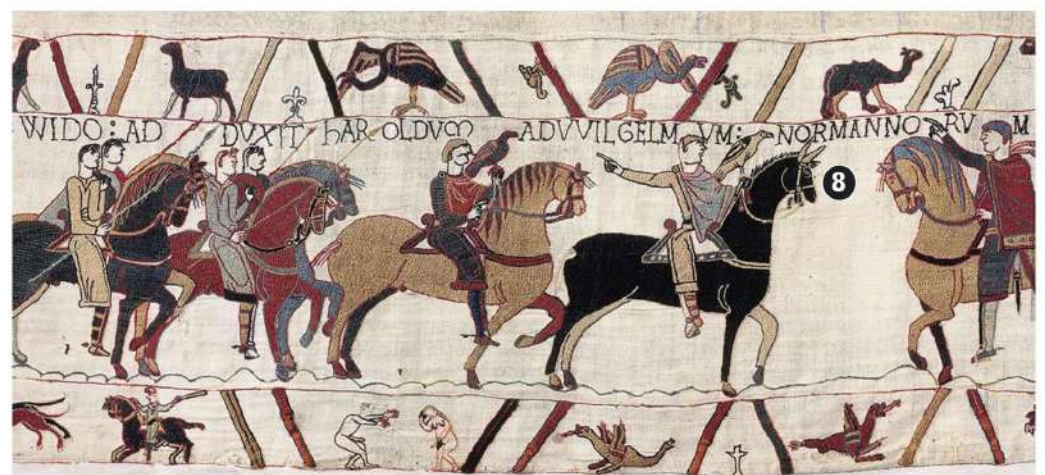
What did the designers think of Harold's captor?

Wherever Harold meant to go, his journey goes horribly wrong when his ship lands in Ponthieu, northern France, and he is captured by the local count, Guy **1**. Humiliated and stripped of his sword **2**, Harold is rescued when a messenger reports his plight to Duke William who sends his thuggish-

looking envoys to threaten or bribe Guy **3** to hand over his prisoner.

The tapestry designer appears particularly hostile to Guy of Ponthieu (who, incidentally, enjoys more costume changes than anyone else in the tapestry). He keeps a frivolous court – we see what is probably a jester, in

a fringed costume **4**, and a dwarf **5**; his dubious sexuality is implied by him clasping a sword by the blade (is it blunt?) **6**, his effete stance and the 'half-men' in the upper border **7**. He rides a horse with ass's ears **8** for his meeting with William – the implication being that Guy is a fool.



Guy – identifiable by his striking hair style – possibly planned to hold Harold for ransom. In the tapestry he is maligned as effeminate and dim-witted

The tapestry designer appears particularly hostile to Guy of Ponthieu... He rides a horse with ass's ears for his meeting with William

Norman historians later called Harold a perjurer for reneging on his oath to William and taking the throne of England for himself



DETAIL TAPISSERIE DE BAYEUX © VILLE DE BAYEUX

Harold's oath to Duke William

A pledge made in bad faith or under duress?

Harold and William have come to an agreement and Harold has joined William's campaign against Brittany. William has rewarded him with armour, a doubtful honour since it makes Harold a vassal of the duke of Normandy. Probably counting himself lucky to get away in one piece, Harold is on the brink of embarking for England when William demands he take an oath, as shown above.

The tapestry is the only historical source

that places the oath-taking in Bayeux. We are not told what Harold had to promise, but he looks unhappy about it, as his right hand makes a gesture of oath-taking on a portable reliquary **1** and his left rests on a reliquary on an altar **2**. Norman historians later called him a perjurer for reneging on his oath to William and taking the throne of England for himself. William watches, in authoritative pose; the animal head on his seat **3** smiles smugly.



The death of King Edward

Who did the Confessor intend as his successor?

Edward died, childless, on 5 January 1066. The tapestry scene corresponds to the deathbed described in the contemporary *Life of King Edward*: Queen Edith weeping at the king's feet ①, the archbishop of Canterbury ② and Harold ③ present. Again Edward and Harold touch hands. The *Life* says the dying king entrusted queen and kingdom to Harold, but what did that mean? Was Harold to be regent until William arrived? Or until the king's

great-nephew Edgar grew up? Or did Edward mean Harold to become king?

The tapestry later shows councillors offering Harold the crown, and his subsequent coronation. Did the king make a deathbed gift of the kingdom to his brother-in-law, the capable man on the spot as invasion threatened? If so, should that have overruled a promise made to his Norman cousin in 1051? Indeed, did Edward really make that promise to William?



The Normans prepare to invade

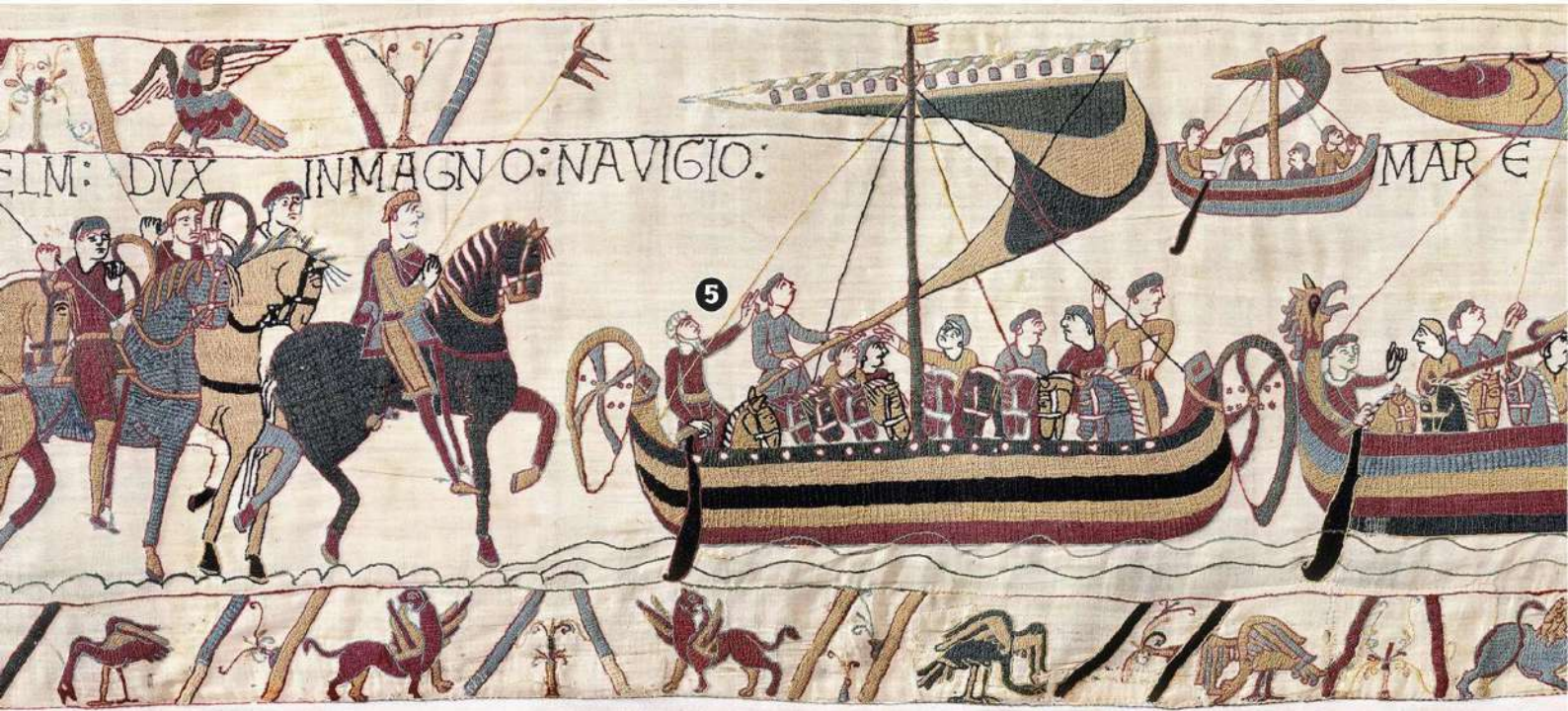
Trees are felled and boats are loaded up for war

When news arrives in Normandy that Harold has taken the throne, William **1**, advised by his half-brother Odo **2**, bishop of Bayeux (who many think was the commissioner of the tapestry), plans invasion. The designer ignores the larger council that William consulted and makes it a family affair. Borrowing scenes indirectly from Trajan's Column in Rome

and from an illustrated biblical manuscript in Canterbury (the ship-builders are copied from Noah building the ark) **3**, the designer conveys the enormity of the preparations. The servants pulling the cart make traditional gestures of puzzlement **4** ("Shouldn't oxen be doing this? They do on Roman sculptures!").

Adopting the daring tactic of embarking

horses so they can fight as cavalry, the Normans set off to cross the Channel **5** overnight, landing in Pevensey on 28 September 1066. Harold was in the north, having won a decisive victory against the forces of the king of Norway and his own brother Tostig at Stamford Bridge on 25 September. The tapestry ignores this triumph.



Borrowing scenes indirectly from Trajan's Column in Rome and from an illustrated biblical manuscript in Canterbury, the tapestry designer conveys the enormity of the preparations



The battle of Hastings

Is it Harold with an arrow in his eye?

Despite Harold's forces being tired and depleted by their campaign in the north, they held their own for some time in the long battle of Hastings. Norman horsemen are shown tumbling horribly at a fortified ditch **1**, and William **2** is forced to lift his helmet and show his face to prove that he still lives. His

brother, Bishop Odo **3**, gallops onto the battlefield brandishing a club, to rally the troops.

The famous arrow in Harold's eye is a modern repair. Whether the tapestry originally showed an arrow **4**, or something else, such as a spear, is disputed, also whether this figure represents Harold or an-

other warrior. The tapestry doesn't usually show a person twice in the same scene. Clearly, though, Harold is cut down by a sword and killed **5**, *hic Harold rex interfectus est*. This was the deciding factor in the battle, marking the end of the Anglo-Saxon era and the beginning of the Norman. **11**



Clearly Harold is cut down by a sword and killed, marking the end of the Anglo-Saxon era and the beginning of the Norman



Gale R Owen-Crocker is professor emerita at the University of Manchester, specialising in Anglo-Saxon culture and medieval textiles. She is the author of *The Bayeux Tapestry: Collected Papers* (Ashgate, 2012)

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WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR

HERO OR VILLAIN?

Was the Norman invader a great leader who ushered in a new civilised era for England - or a greedy brute who terrorised the Anglo-Saxons?

Nicholas Vincent offers his interpretation of the Conqueror's true character

A mid-15th-century illumination depicts the Conqueror as a noble warrior-king. Yet this perception comes largely from partisan contemporary writings



The Conquest / Hero or villain?

A 14th-century family tree shows William's descendants, including sons William II 'Rufus' and Henry I

Willelmus Romanorum Willelmus in Valido
Rex est Anglorum bello conquestor eorum



Willelmus Conquestor Anglie genuit de Mienora Regina

Robertus
Curte
Bose

Willelmus
Rufus

Henricus
Regem

Adam
Comitissa
Blesene

Theobaldus
Comitissa
Blesene

Constance
Comitissa
Normannie

Stephanus
Regis

Conquestor Regnavit .xx. annis .xi. mensibus. Cadamo interit

The Norman conquest was presented as God's punishment for England's sins, so William could be portrayed as divinely appointed scourge

Put at its crudest, William the Conqueror was, both literally and figuratively, 'William the Bastard'. His modern heroic reputation results from the deliberate distortions of

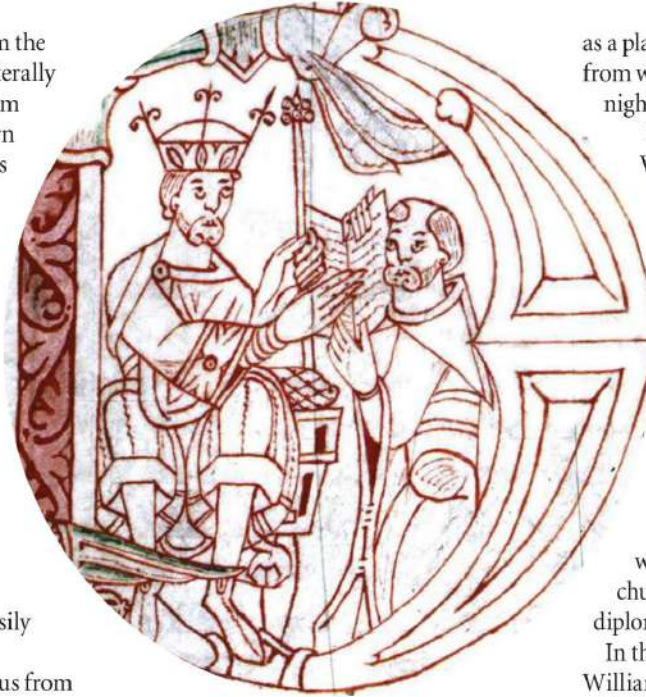
evidence by his contemporaries.

Conquerors who control the historical record are generally feted as heroes. Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, to some extent Napoleon – all commissioned memorials to prolong their fame. Those who lose such control are dismissed as megalomaniacs: Attila, Hitler, Stalin. William the Conqueror is generally placed in the first of these categories. Were it not for his iron grip over the writing of history, he might easily have been consigned to the second.

What we know of William comes to us from his admirers rather than his critics. From long before 1066, the writing of history in Normandy consisted of panegyrics in praise of the ruling dynasty. William and his ancestors, descended from pagan Vikings, were determined to prove the legitimacy of their rule over northern France. What emerged was the first stirring of what modern historians call 'the Norman myth': the idea that, having adopted Christianity, the Normans acquired a providential role in world history, destined to conquer not just in England in 1066 but also in Sicily and, after 1095, on crusade to Antioch and Jerusalem.

The chief myth-makers here – the chroniclers William of Jumièges and William of Poitiers – both worked under ducal patronage. Their English or Anglo-Norman successors – most notably John of Worcester, Orderic Vitalis and William of Malmesbury – wrote in the aftermath of 1066 to explain why William and the Normans secured so unexpected and total a victory. The most obvious explanation was that the Norman conquest was God's punishment for England's sins. As a result, William himself could be portrayed not as villain but as divinely appointed scourge.

A positive spin was applied even to the circumstances of William's birth. In theory, no illegitimate son could sit on a ducal throne, let alone a royal one. Yet there is no doubt that William was illegitimate. At a time when the



An illumination in the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* (Deeds of the Norman Dukes) shows the Conqueror receiving the manuscript from his approved historian, William of Jumièges

church demanded ever-stricter observance of the laws of marriage, William's mother, Herleva, remained unmarried to his father, Duke Robert 'the Magnificent'. Rumour, already circulating by the 1050s, identified Herleva as the daughter of a tanner from Falaise, associated with a trade mired in dung and the stench of the abattoir. Besieged by William in the early 1050s, the men of Alençon taunted him from the town walls, beating on pelts and furs, mocking his mother's low birth. William's response was characteristic. As soon as Alençon fell, those who had mocked him were deprived of their hands and feet.

The events at Alençon were themselves symptomatic of a political crisis in Normandy that the chroniclers were tantalisingly reluctant to report. Duke Robert died in 1035 while on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, leaving no legitimate heir. Aged only about eight, William was caught in a power struggle that took more than two decades to resolve. Normandy fissured between various factions backed by the neighbouring rulers of France, Brittany and Anjou. At least two of William's tutors were murdered. His court became notorious

as a place of conspiracy and assassination from which William had to be sheltered at night, hidden in the houses of the poor.

Fatherless and raised amid paranoia, William triumphed through a combination of diplomacy and calculated terror. Acting in association with the king of France, in 1047 he defeated his rivals from western Normandy in battle at Val-ès-Dunes. The opposition was then hunted down, killed or exiled.

In 1050 or 1051, to consolidate support from the north, William married Matilda, daughter of the Count of Flanders. William and Matilda were cousins, so their marriage was immediately condemned by the church. Acceptance came only after intense diplomatic negotiations with the papacy.

In the meantime, the king of France, William's former ally, joined with the count of Anjou to threaten Normandy's southern frontier. Even William's uncle, the count of Arques, joined the rebellion. Once again showing his coolness under pressure, William first seized the castle at Arques and then ensured his enemies were defeated in battle at Mortemer in 1054. A second attempted invasion in 1057 ended in victory for William at Varaville near Caen. Only from this point, in his early thirties, could William claim full mastery over Normandy. In the meantime, victory in at least three battles proclaimed him both a master tactician and a military commander peculiarly favoured by God.

Ambitions on England

There followed a whirlwind of activity and aggression. Pushing south and west into Maine and Brittany, William laid the basis for his reputation as a conqueror in France. More significantly, he revived plans already devised by his father, Duke Robert, for a Norman descent upon England.

The mother of England's King Edward the Confessor was herself a Norman – William's great-aunt Emma. Edward had been raised in exile in Normandy, returning to England in the 1030s with Norman assistance. Thereafter, following his accession in 1042, he looked to his young cousin, William of Normandy, as a potential heir. The intention was to play off William against the influence of the Godwinsons, the most powerful aristocratic



A scene from the Bayeux tapestry shows Harold being taken to William's palace at Rouen, where he was obliged to swear an oath supporting the Norman's claim to the English throne after the eventual death of King Edward the Confessor

dynasty in 11th-century England, into which Edward had been obliged to marry – but which he was determined to exclude from the throne.

As Edward's marriage remained childless, Norman prospects improved. In 1051, at a time when the Godwinsons were temporarily exiled, William may have been encouraged to cross to England to discuss his claims. In the early 1060s, when Harold Godwinson found himself blown off course in the English Channel and handed over to William as prisoner, the Norman duke obliged Harold to swear an oath. Harold promised that, when Edward died, William would be permitted to succeed him as king.

So far, and but for the relentless sycophancy of the Norman chroniclers, there was little to distinguish William from many other French warlords. Following the collapse of central government in 10th-century Francia, many such men had taken advantage of civil disorder to carve out principalities for themselves. By such means Flanders, Brittany, Anjou, Aquitaine, Blois, Champagne and Burgundy had all achieved a degree of independence. It was only his conquest of England that promoted William, canny French warlord, to the status of internationally reputed tyrant.

Many had taken advantage of civil disorder to carve out principalities in France. But it was his conquest of England that promoted William to the status of internationally reputed tyrant

In January 1066, Edward the Confessor died. Ignoring his earlier promises to William, Harold Godwinson sought coronation as Edward's successor. William assembled an alliance – not just of Normans but also of warriors from Flanders via Brittany to Aquitaine – prepared to hazard their fortunes. Against improbable odds, at Hastings in October 1066 this force not only defeated Harold but slaughtered a large proportion of the Anglo-Saxon ruling class. God had clearly spoken. William was God's instrument, and England, one of the wealthiest kingdoms in Christendom, now lay at William's disposal.

Deciding on despotism

Two options beckoned. Had he chosen the first, ruling through English representatives, William might have presided over a truly Anglo-Norman confederation. In much this way, earlier that century the Dane Cnut had governed England in an Anglo-Scandinavian alliance. Alternatively, through brutality and violence, the Normans might seek to displace what remained of the English aristocracy, establishing England as an offshore colony of Normandy. After a brief period of uncertainty, it was this second option that William chose.



A martial statue of William in Falaise, near the castle where he was born around 1028. It took him a quarter of a century to secure his rule in Normandy before looking to England

Though he was provoked by the fear of English resistance, there can be no doubt that, after 1070, William's occupation of England developed as that of a military dictator sharing out the spoils of a defeated land. To cite a modern parallel, as with Europe after 1940, not only was England divided into zones of occupation each assigned to military governors, but native collaborators proved crucial to the continued functioning of law, administration and tax-gathering.

Stopping only just short of genocide, William and his cronies not only seized land, women and treasure, but also slaughtered or hounded into exile all but a few scattered survivors of what had previously been the Anglo-Saxon ruling elite. Thousands died. A rich native culture was subordinated to the glorification of foreign conquerors and a foreign, French-speaking king.

Certain crimes went unforgiven even by William's keenest supporters. His biographer, William of Poitiers, was horrified by the carnage at Hastings, the bodies unburied and the slaughter unleashed. All the chroniclers agree that William's campaign against the north of England in the winter of 1069–70 was fought with deliberate brutality, to provoke

famine and suffering. Even 20 years later, this 'Harrying of the North' left its scars upon the great survey known as Domesday. Domesday itself, although viewed today as one of the great symbols of Norman efficiency, was at the time considered by the English to be a shameful thing: an attempt to inventory every acre of land, every pig and cow, to satisfy William's insatiable appetite for money and power.

Lust and gluttony

Meanwhile, despite William's public commitment to religion and justice, in 1076 he commanded the beheading of Earl Waltheof, one of the few remaining scions of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy. At his burial place in Lincolnshire, Waltheof was venerated as a martyr. In private it was rumoured that the king abandoned himself to lust and self-indulgence. Hence the accusations of sexual overindulgence, and the suggestion that, by the end of his life, William had grown so fat that his monstrous paunch, jolting against the pommel of his saddle, brought about his death. In all of this there was awareness that, no matter how great his achievement in England, William remained unsated, addicted to continued violence against Brittany, Anjou and

France. By these means, in the end, he brought about his own destruction.

There are hints that William was himself plagued by guilt. His magnanimity towards Harold Godwinson, whose body was promised decent burial at Waltham in Essex, and William's foundation of Battle Abbey on the field of combat, both suggest a desire to propitiate God. So, too, does the public penance authorised in the aftermath of Hastings. For every man slain on the battlefield, the killer was to do a year's penance fasting on bread and water. For every blow struck that might have killed, 40 days of fasting. For every blow so much as contemplated, three days. And so forth, through categories that would have left the king and his entourage owing penance of several years, perhaps of several lifetimes.

After his death in 1087, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle – last vestige of a proud tradition of English vernacular historical writing – pleaded for mercy upon William's soul. It nonetheless summarised his life in revealing terms. This was a king, the Chronicle alleged, "who had castles built and poor men hard oppressed", and that "into avarice did he fall, and loved greediness above all". Setting aside large parts of England as his own hunting reserves (or 'forests') he protected the game with draconian punishments so that "those who slew hart or hind should themselves be made blind".

Tyrants from Cyrus the Great to Hermann Göring have earned similar epitaphs. Few, however, have quite matched William the Bastard's combination of greed and cruelty masquerading as divinely justified providence. Like the conquistadors in Mexico, William enslaved an entire nation to burnish his fame. Like Cromwell in Ireland, he deliberately assaulted a nation of fellow Christians.

From 1066 can be traced a significant thread in England's history. As a result of 1066, England remained a land steeped in bloodshed, its peace maintained only through menace and the threat of state-sponsored violence. It was William 'the Bastard' who first imposed this Norman 'yoke' on English shoulders. His success should remind us that whoever controls the writing of history also controls the future's verdict on the past. **H**

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THE FAMILY OF THE CONQUEROR



Robert 'Curthose'

William's eldest son was also the least competent, beaten to the English throne by two brothers

Robert 'Curthose' ('short socks') was the eldest and the longest lived of the sons of William the Conqueror: born c1050, he was in his eighties when he died in 1134. His career was defined by pride and bone-headedness. Inheriting Normandy, he contested the claim to the English throne of his brother, William 'Rufus'. The resulting civil war ended with Robert being sent off to Jerusalem on the First Crusade. He returned to Normandy in time to witness the accession in England of his third brother, Henry I. Rebelling again, Robert was taken captive in 1106 at the battle of Tinchebray in Normandy, spending the next 28 years as a prisoner. The fact that he lacked the resources to supplant his younger brothers from their claim to England's throne shows that, as early as the 1080s, Normandy had been surpassed by that far richer and more dynamic realm.



William II 'Rufus'

The Conqueror's favourite inherited the English crown – and became the second son to die in a hunting accident

The Conqueror's third son – also William, known as 'Rufus', probably because of his red hair – succeeded to the throne of England in 1087, in theory as a junior partner to his elder brother, Robert. In reality, he inherited both his father's brains and by far the wealthier part of the Anglo-Norman dominion. Unmarried and – it has

been suggested by some – homosexual, he contemplated further conquests in Ireland and Aquitaine. In the event, he died in his mid-forties in 1100, victim of a hunting accident in the New Forest. Some claimed this was an act of murder, others that William was struck by a carelessly discharged crossbow bolt.



The death of king William 'Rufus' may have been an accident – or a murder planned by his brother Henry, who was swiftly crowned after the incident

Adela of Blois

The Conqueror's daughter co-ruled much of northern France



William's youngest daughter was married into one of the great dynasties of northern France, rulers of Blois and Chartres, south of Paris. The achievements of Adela and her father so overawed her husband Stephen, Count of Blois, that he felt obliged to join the First Crusade to Jerusalem. Branded a coward for abandoning the siege of Antioch, Stephen was persuaded to return to the Holy Land three years later, dying in battle at Ramla in 1102. He fathered several children by Adela, of which the third, Stephen, succeeded to the throne of England in 1135.

Henry I

William's youngest son manipulated his way to the English throne



In theory, Henry had no prospect of succeeding as king. Nonetheless, when William 'Rufus' died in 1100, Henry moved with agility to outmanoeuvre his brother Robert, seizing the late king's treasure and, with it, political impetus and the crown. The best-educated of his family, Henry was also the most ruthless, imprisoning, blinding and castrating those who stood in his way. His death in 1135, leaving his daughter as heir, plunged England and Normandy into 20 years of civil war known as 'the Anarchy'.

Richard

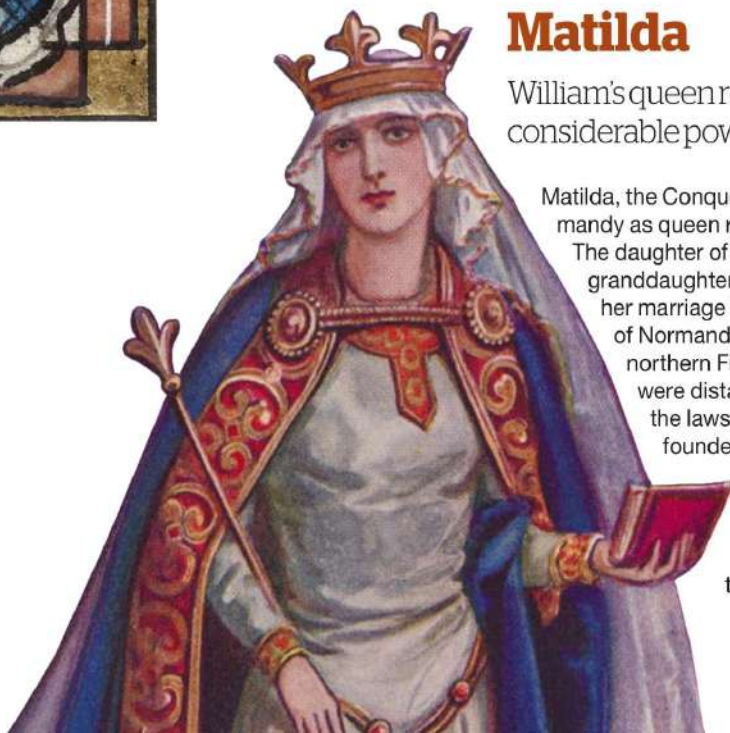
Was the fate of the second son retribution?



Richard, the Conqueror's second son, died at some time between 1069 and 1074 as the result of a hunting accident in the New Forest. A mere youth, it is possible that he broke his neck when his horse bolted through trees. Prefiguring the circumstances of the death of his brother William 'Rufus' 30 years later, Richard's death was widely interpreted as divine punishment for the Conqueror's brutal transformation of Hampshire into royal forest. So, it was alleged, were the sins of the father visited upon not one but at least two of his sons.

Matilda

William's queen regent wielded considerable power in her own right



Matilda, the Conqueror's wife, ruled England and Normandy as queen regent during William's absences.

The daughter of count Baldwin V of Flanders, and granddaughter of Robert the Pious, king of France, her marriage in c1050 or 1051 brought William of Normandy prestige and military alliances in northern France. Because husband and wife were distant cousins, it also ran contrary to the laws of the church. In penance, William founded the Benedictine abbey of Saint-Étienne at Caen. Matilda founded the sister abbey of La Trinité half a mile away, where she was buried in 1083. After her death, her sons fell to squabbling and civil war.

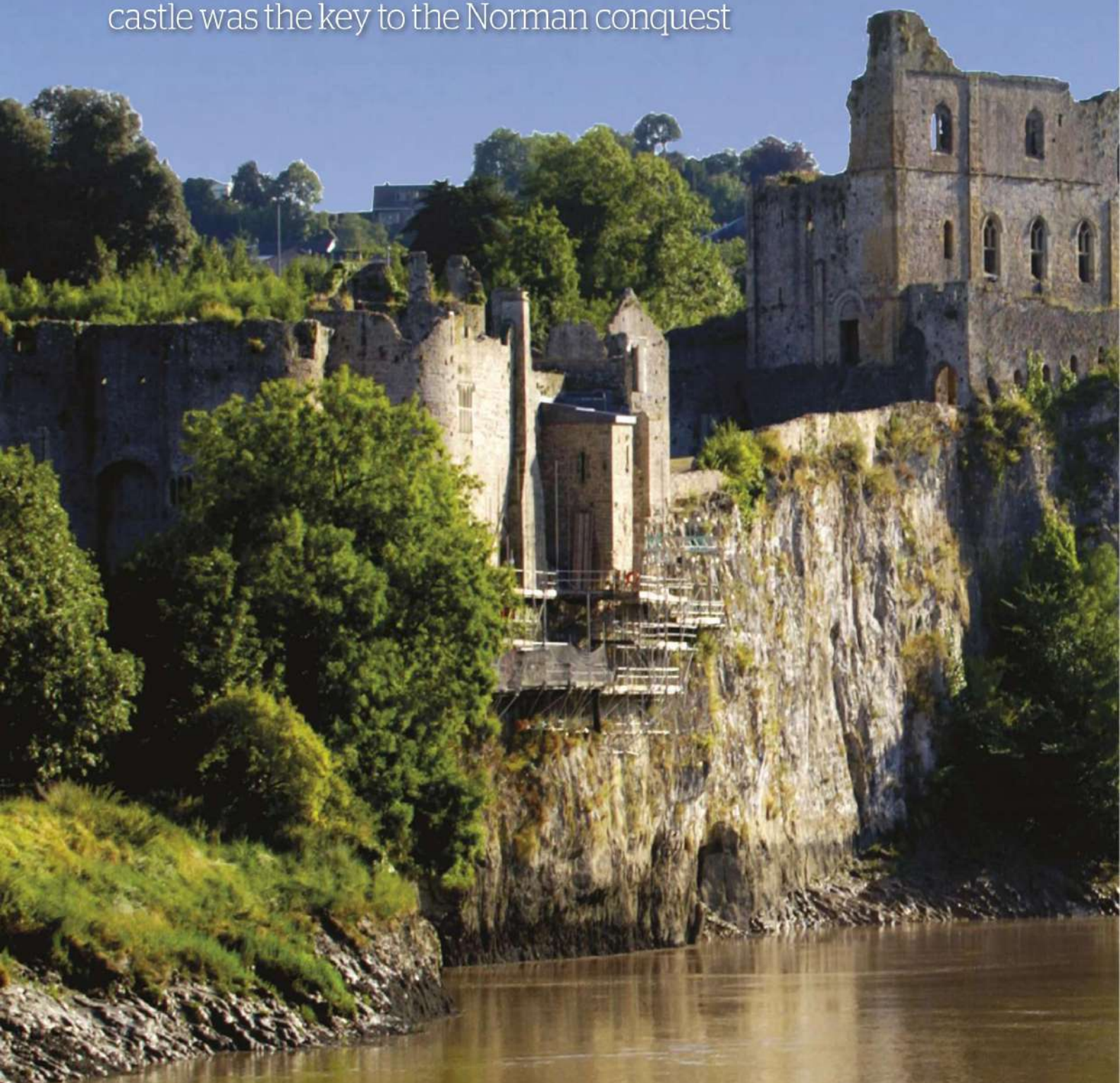
IMPACT INVAS

Explore the turbulent aftermath of the Conquest and trace the transformation of England's political, social, physical and religious landscape under the new Norman regime

OF ION

CASTLES *of the*

When William the Conqueror invaded England he introduced a startling new military tactic. **Marc Morris** explains why the castle was the key to the Norman conquest



CONQUEROR



Sitting on the cliffs over the river Wye, Chepstow Castle's great tower (centre) stood as a permanent reminder of English royal authority in south Wales



A scene from the Bayeux Tapestry shows William the Conqueror's army building a castle at Hastings

In 1066, as everybody knows, the Normans invaded England. That most engaging of all medieval sources, the Bayeux Tapestry, shows them landing their horses at Pevensey in Sussex and racing to occupy nearby Hastings, from where they would shortly set out to fight the most famous battle in English history.

Before that, they paused to have an elaborate sit-down meal – barbecued chicken is on the menu – and attend to their own protection. “This man,” says the caption of an important-looking Norman (shown above) holding a pennant, “orders a castle to be dug at Hastings,” and to his right we see a group of men, armed with picks and shovels, setting to work.

Castles were virtually unknown in England until the arrival of the Normans

The Normans’ decision to erect a castle at the very moment of their arrival might not strike us as particularly remarkable. After all, medieval warfare revolved around the building and besieging of fortresses, and the English landscape of today is liberally studded with their remains. But at the time of the invasion in late September 1066, the Normans’ action was startlingly novel: prior to that point, castles had been virtually unknown in England.

The exceptions comprised a handful constructed a few years earlier by the French friends of King Edward the Confessor. “The foreigners had built a castle in Herefordshire,” says the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for 1051,

“and had inflicted every possible injury and insult upon the king’s men in those parts”.

The fact that the chronicler was reporting a new phenomenon is conveyed not only by his palpable outrage at the Frenchmen’s behaviour, but also by his need to borrow their word for the offending object: this is the first recorded use of ‘castle’ in English.

The Conquest that followed 15 years later ensured it would not be the last, because the castle was the primary instrument by which the Normans stamped their authority on England. From having almost no castles in the period before 1066, the country was quickly crowded with them. According to one conservative modern estimate, based on the number of surviving earthworks, at least 500, and possibly closer to 1,000, had been constructed by the end of the 11th century – barely two generations since the Normans’ initial landing.

Of course, England had not been without defences before 1066. The pre-Conquest landscape was studded with, among other things, Iron Age hillforts, Roman legionary forts, and the fortified towns built by the Anglo-Saxons themselves, known as boroughs or *burhs*. But all of these structures differed from what followed in that they were large enclosures designed to protect sizeable communities including, in some cases, non-military personnel. Castles, by contrast, were comparatively small affairs, designed to be defended by a limited number of fighting men. They had originated in France around the turn of the first millennium as a result of the collapse of royal and provincial authority, when power ultimately devolved to those who had the means to build their own private fortifications and fill them with mounted warriors.

As well as being smaller in area, castles were also taller. Some of the earliest French examples were great stone towers, such as the soaring donjon at Loches on the river Loire (pictured on page 79), built by the buccaneering Fulk Nerra, count of Anjou, around AD 1000, and still impressive 1,000 years later.

But the crucial thing about castles was that they could be created without the need for such colossal investment. It was quite possible to obtain the same advantage of height quickly and on a fraction of the budget by throwing up a great mound of earth and topping it with a tower of wood. As every schoolchild knows, such mounds were known from the first as ‘mottes’.

The point about size and speed is reinforced by the Normans’ behaviour in England immediately after their arrival. At



Silver pennies of William I. The early years of his reign in England were marked by bloody repression

Pevensey they created a castle by adapting a Roman fort, and at Hastings by customising an Iron Age hillfort, in each case hiving off a smaller section of the much larger original.

After their victory at Hastings, as they set about crushing the remaining English resistance, the Normans continued to follow this method of construction. They added new fortifications to the ancient defences at Dover, and almost certainly created the castle at Wallingford by destroying a corner of the Anglo-Saxon borough.

When, late in 1066, the citizens of London at last submitted to William the Conqueror, his first thought was to plant a castle in the south-eastern angle of the city – the site that would soon become home to the Tower.

Rising in revolt

In the years that followed, the castle-building campaign intensified. The Normans, wept the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for 1067, “built castles far and wide throughout the land, oppressing the unhappy people, and things went ever from bad to worse”.

Part of the reason for this intensification was the repeated attempts by the English to throw off the rule of their conquerors. The south-west of England rose in revolt at the start of 1068, apparently led by the surviving remnants of the Godwin family, while in the summer of the same year there were similar risings in the Midlands and northern England.

William crushed them all, marching in with his army and planting castles in major towns and cities. Exeter, Nottingham, Warwick, York, Lincoln, Cambridge and Huntingdon all received new royal fortresses at this time, and further examples were added in the years that followed: Chester and Stafford in 1069–70, Ely in 1071 and Durham in 1072.

The northernmost outpost of Norman power was established in 1080 by the Conqueror’s son Robert, who planted a “new castle” upon the river Tyne, while William himself marked the western limit of his authority during an expedition to Wales the following year, founding a new fortress in an old Roman fort called Cardiff.

The foundation of castles, however, was far from being an exclusively royal affair. William may have raised armies to quell major rebellions, but for the rest of the time he relied on other Normans to keep order in his new kingdom.

In the two decades after 1066 the king rewarded his closest followers with extensive grants of land in England, and the first act of any sensible incoming lord was invariably to construct a castle. In some instances it appears that these were planted on top of existing English seigniorial residences, to emphasise a continuity of lordship.

But in most cases such continuity was lacking because the process of conquest had caused the country’s existing tenurial map to be torn up. Sussex, for example, was sliced up into half-a-dozen new lordships, known locally as rapes, which paid no heed to earlier patterns of ownership. New lordships required new castles, and the rapes were named in each case after the fortresses that sprung up at Chichester, Hastings, Bramber, Arundel, Lewes and Pevensey.

The reorganisation of Sussex into continental-style, castle-centred lordships seems to have been a decision determined by cold military logic. The county had been the Normans’ beachhead, and also the former Godwin heartland. The rapes run north-south, and their castles are all located near the coast, as if to keep the route between London and Normandy secure.

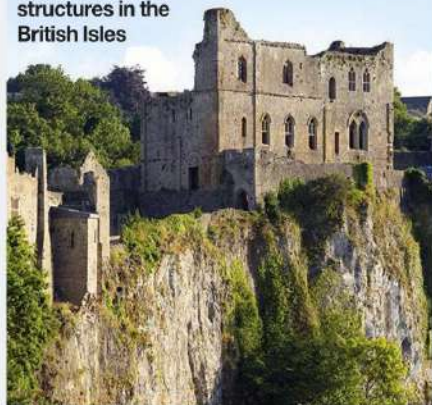
In recent decades, however, the scholarly trend has been to emphasise that castles had

William's castles 1066-87

From the moment his army landed on English soil, the Conqueror embarked on a remarkable programme of castle-building, as our map demonstrates

MAP ILLUSTRATION BY MARTIN SANDERS

The Great Tower at Chepstow Castle, one of the earliest Norman stone structures in the British Isles



1 Chepstow

Established by the Conqueror's friend William fitz Osbern soon after 1066, Chepstow was acquired by the king in 1075, after which construction is reckoned to have started on its Great Tower.

2 Pevensey

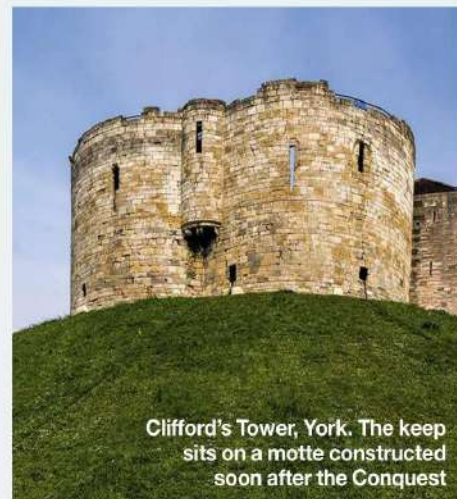
William built his first castle in England here, the point of the Normans' disembarkation, to protect his army while they prepared to engage Harold Godwinson.

3 Dover

After his victory at Hastings, William reportedly spent eight days at Dover, an Iron Age hillfort, "adding the fortifications it lacked". Afterwards it was entrusted to his half-brother Odo of Bayeux.

4 London

This was established shortly before Christmas 1066, "as a defence against the inconstancy of the numerous and hostile inhabitants" (wrote William of Poitiers). Work on the White Tower started in the 1070s and continued until the early 12th century.



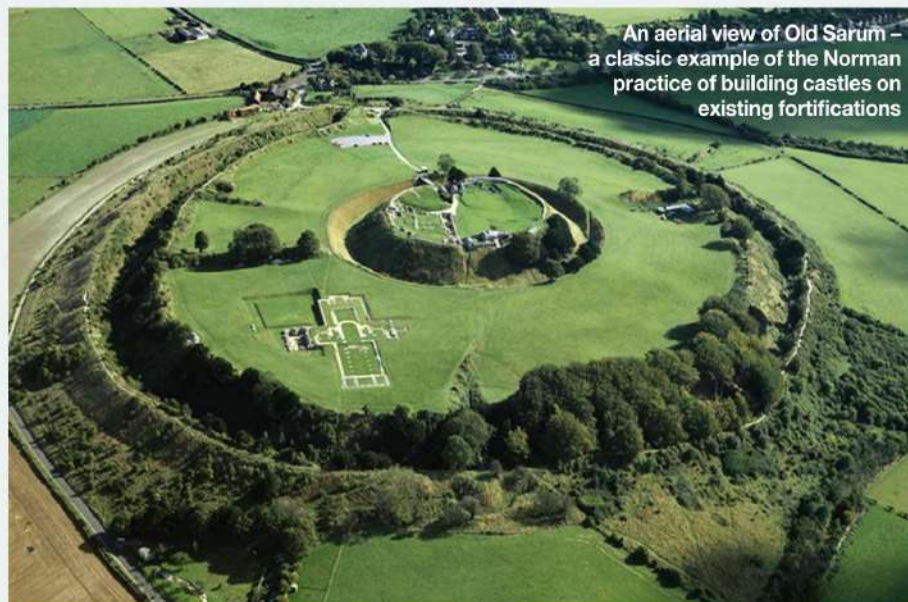
Clifford's Tower, York. The keep sits on a motte constructed soon after the Conquest

8 York

William built not one but two castles in York: the first (Clifford's Tower) was constructed in the summer of 1068, the second (Baile Hill) early the following year.

9 Norwich

Norwich was begun before 1075; that year Ralph Guader, the rebellious earl of East Anglia, was besieged here for three months.



An aerial view of Old Sarum – a classic example of the Norman practice of building castles on existing fortifications

5 Old Sarum

Planted in the middle of an Iron Age hillfort, Old Sarum was probably begun before 1070, when the Conqueror went there to dismiss his army after the Harrying of the North.

6 Windsor

This most famous of English castles was created a short distance from an existing royal hunting lodge, probably before the council held at Windsor in 1070.

7 Durham

On his return from Scotland in 1072, William stopped to plant a castle in Durham where, three years earlier, his troops had been massacred by the Northumbrians.



Colchester Castle has the largest floor-plan of any Norman keep

10 Colchester

A gigantic building, with close affinities to the Tower of London, Colchester illustrates William's desire to be compared to the Romans before him.

KEY NORMAN CASTLES

From Newcastle in the north to Exeter in the south, William planted castles in strategic locations



On subduing London, William I immediately decided to stamp his authority by building a castle there. The White Tower, pictured here, was begun during his reign



other roles beyond the military. The fact that they were often sited to command road and river routes, for example, meant that their owners were also well placed to control trade, and could both protect and exploit mercantile traffic. We are reminded, too, that part of the reason for building a castle could be symbolic. A great fortress, towering above everything else for miles around, provided a constant physical reminder of its owner's power – a permanent assertion of his right to rule.

A great fortress provided a constant physical reminder of its owner's power

During the Conqueror's reign, this was most obviously true in the case of the three great stone towers the king himself is known to have created at Chepstow, Colchester and (most famously) London. In each case these giant buildings, the like of which England had not seen since the time of the Romans, have strong Roman resonances and were partially constructed using the stone from nearby Roman ruins; not for nothing did 20th-century scholars christen the style 'Romanesque'.

GETTY IMAGES



The great tower at Loches, central France, an example of how early castle-builders sought to achieve the advantage of height over any attackers

Indeed, in the case of Colchester it is difficult to suggest a reason for the construction of so massive a building – beyond a desire to be associated with the town's imperial past. There are no reports of rebellions or military action in Essex during William's reign, but the great tower he created in Colchester was erected on the ruins of the town's Roman temple. The Conqueror's sycophantic biographer, William of Poitiers, draws frequent comparisons between his

royal master and Julius Caesar. To judge from buildings such as Chepstow, Colchester and the Tower of London, it was a comparison that the king himself was keen to cultivate.


At the same time, we need to guard against hyper-correction. In recent years, it seems to me, the revisionist arguments about Norman castles have been pushed too far, to the extent that some historians now come close to arguing that they had almost no military function at all.

Take, for example, the castle that William the Conqueror caused to be built at Exeter in 1068. Its original gatehouse still survives, and has been judged defensively weak because it was originally entered at ground level. This may be so, but it takes a considerable leap to conclude from this, as one historian has done, that the whole castle was "militarily ineffectual".

Much of the site has now vanished, but it occupied an area of around 185 metres by 185 metres (600 by 600 feet); Domesday Book suggests that 48 houses were destroyed in order to make room for it. It was built on the highest point in the town, and was separated by a deep ditch and rampart.

Exeter had fallen to William in 1068 after a bitter three-week siege that saw heavy casualties on both sides – and during which, if we believe the later chronicler William of





The years after 1066 were filled with bloody rebellion and repression

Malmesbury, one of the English defenders signalled his defiance by dropping his trousers and farting in the king's general direction. It beggars belief to suppose that the Conqueror, having taken the city at such cost, would have commissioned a building that had no military capability, and was concerned only with the projection of what has been called 'peaceable power'.

The notion that castles had little military purpose also requires us to ignore the testimony of contemporary chroniclers. William of Poitiers repeatedly describes the castles his master besieged on the continent before 1066 using terms such as "very strong" or "virtually impregnable". Such descriptions are borne out by the fact that it took the duke months, and in some cases years, to take them.

Yet some scholars are curiously reluctant to allow that castles built after the Conquest served a similar military purpose. The Conqueror's great stone tower at Chepstow, for instance, has been plausibly reinterpreted in recent years as an audience chamber where the king or his representatives could receive and overawe the native rulers of Wales.

But the fact is that Chepstow Castle was still a formidable building, situated high on a cliff above the river Wye, and defended at each end by ditches cut deep into the rock. True, it does not bristle with arrowloops, turrets and machicolations – but then no castles did in that period, because the technology of attack was primitive in comparison with what came later. Without the great stone-throwing machines known as

trebuchets, there was not much an enemy at the gates could do, beyond mounting a blockade and trying to starve a garrison into submission.

In these circumstances, a well-situated and well-stocked castle could be militarily decisive. In 1069 the people of Northumbria overran Durham, massacring its Norman garrison, which tried and failed to hold out in the hall of the local bishop. But when the Northumbrians attempted to take the town again in 1080 they failed, because they were unable to take its new castle.

Subduing the English

One of the remarkable things about the Norman conquest was how quickly the rift between the English and the Normans was healed. Within a generation or two, it is possible to point to castles that did owe more to ideas of peaceful living than military deterrence. But in the years immediately after 1066, filled as they were with bloody rebellion and even bloodier repression – when a few thousand Normans lived among a population of two million English in the daily fear of violent death – in these circumstances castles have to be regarded first and foremost as military installations, introduced to subdue an unwilling population.

Unfashionable though it may be among castle scholars, there is every reason to listen to the testimony of the half-English, half-Norman historian Orderic Vitalis, born in Shropshire within a decade of 1066, who attributed the success of the Conquest to one factor above all others.

"The fortifications that the Normans called castles," he explains, "were scarcely known in the English provinces, and so the English – in spite of their courage and love of fighting – could put up only a weak resistance to their enemies." **II**

Marc Morris is a historian and broadcaster specialising in the Middle Ages. He is the author of *The Norman Conquest* (Hutchinson, 2012)

Pevensey Castle in East Sussex. As at other early sites, William's men formed the castle here by hiving off a section of the much larger Roman fort



A detail from a plaque depicting the battle of Hastings. By 1100 at least 500 castles had sprung up across England and Wales



The Normans built hundreds of castles, such as this one at Caldicot, in a takeover that involved both slow assimilation and brutal suppression

BUILDING A NEW ENGLAND

William's victory at Hastings didn't just mean a new-for-old change of rule – it triggered a complete overhaul of the English political, social and religious landscape. **Stephen Church** reveals how the Normans reshaped England from the top down



Reproduction of the sanctuary
door knocker from Durham's
Norman-built cathedral

1066 was a disastrous year for the English nobility as much of it was cut down. William's conquest was made all the more possible by the loss of personnel among the English

Bamburgh Castle in Northumberland, which still retains its medieval footprint and 12th-century keep, was established in 1070 to bring the north east under control





In 1066, England existed as a kingdom and had done since the 10th century, but its boundaries were not as they are now. The men who guided the collection of evidence that was used to compile Domesday Book did not survey lands north of the river Tees; and across the Pennines in the north-west, the commissioners took in only a portion of land beyond the Mersey. Administratively, then, the kingdom of England stopped a long way short of the boundaries of the modern country.

But the land beyond the Tees and beyond the Ribble was claimed by English kings as theirs, even if they lacked the administrative structure to bring it entirely under their control. The bishop of Durham was appointed by the English king and his lands were ruled in his name. Beyond the land of the bishop of Durham lay those of the earls of Bamburgh, north of the Tyne, whose allegiance to the English king was always likely to be compromised by the need to deal with a king of the Scots who had his eye on Northumberland (between the Tyne and the Tees). That same king of Scots also had claims over Cumbria which, at various points in the 11th and 12th centuries, he successfully pushed.

England was the creation of a dynasty that was southern and which drew its power from the south, with one focus in the heartlands of this kingdom at Winchester. From this city, the king operated the royal administration. A second focus was at Westminster, where Edward the Confessor had a palace and an abbey. When he died on 5 January 1066, the man who took control of the kingdom was Harold, Earl of Wessex. He was the senior representative of the family that had dominated the political landscape of England for half a century, and it was members of this family, along with their commended men, who met Duke William on Senlac Hill on 14 October 1066. Defeat at Hastings brought disaster for Harold's family, but it also destroyed the thegns (noble retainers) who had marched with them into Sussex. Mostly these were men from Wessex, East Anglia, Herefordshire and the East Midlands.

In the north of England, 1066 also brought about profound change, but not, initially at least, because of the Normans. Here, at the battle of Gate Fulford on 20 September 1066, the forces of Edwin, Earl of Mercia and his brother Morcar, Earl of Northumbria, were slaughtered by a combined force of Vikings led by Harald Hardrada and another of Harold's brothers, Tostig (though the earls survived). Five days later, at Stamford Bridge, Hardrada and

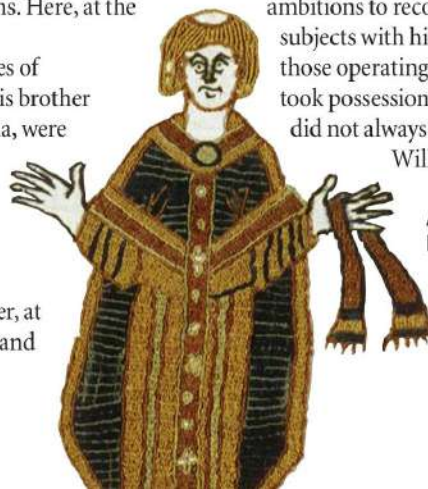
Tostig were killed along with many of their soldiers, including men of the Northumbrian earldom commended to Tostig. So 1066 was a disastrous year for the English nobility: much of it was cut down. William's conquest was made all the more possible (though hardly easy) by the extent of the loss of personnel among the English.

After the victory at Hastings, a sharp encounter with the Londoners and an intimidating military tour through the home counties, the surviving Englishmen were therefore quick to make their peace with the victorious duke. The archbishop of Canterbury, Stigand, was the first to acknowledge William, soon followed by earls Edwin and Morcar as well as others, including the last remaining male member of the West Saxon royal dynasty, Edgar Ætheling. There was to be no fighting on the beaches, nor on the landing grounds, nor in the fields, streets and the hills because there was no national leader commanding a national identity around whom they could muster. The English political elite were left to make peace with Duke William as best they could – and make peace they did.

Reallocating England

William had promised his followers untold riches if they supported him in his endeavour to seize the English throne. But William also claimed to be the lawful and legitimate successor to King Edward and so had a responsibility towards his English subjects. The lands of those who had died at Hastings were clearly forfeit, since they had been held by traitors who had been fighting against their lawful king in the army of a usurper. These lands could be divided among William's followers. But what of the lands of those who had not fought or who had fought but survived? The answer was that they should pay heavily for their disloyalty but, if they could pay, then they would have title to their land confirmed. Those who could not pay, however, were dispossessed and the evidence suggests that a good many English men and women lost their lands this way.

Needless to say, in a conquest situation, many injustices were committed by the incomers. Though William may have had ambitions to reconcile his English subjects with his continental followers, those operating on the ground as they took possession of their new lands did not always apply the letter of William's law with the



A detail from the Bayeux tapestry depicting Stigand, the last Anglo-Saxon archbishop of Canterbury

same level of care as the king might have said he wished. In Worcestershire, for example, the monk who compiled details of the holdings of Worcester cathedral complained bitterly that Normans “usurped the inheritances of Englishmen”, and during 1068 there was a general dispossession of those who had fought at Hastings coupled with a geld (a tax) levied at a swingingly high level.

This rough handling of native rights soon led to conflict. In 1067 in Herefordshire, for example, the Anglo-Saxon Eadric ‘the Wild’ attacked the county town because of conflict with its holder, Richard Fitz Scrob, and in 1068, the men of Exeter rebelled. In Northumbria, resentment at the rule of the southerners blew up with the murder of the incoming earl, Copsi – a Yorkshireman, but one who had managed to ingratiate himself with William enough to have been granted the earldom. Copsi’s replacement, Gospatric, a scion of the house of the earls of Bamburgh, abandoned the earldom in the face of King William’s determination to crush a revolt by Edwin and Morcar. He was replaced by Robert de Commines, a Norman who, on taking up his post in January 1069, was promptly killed.

The massacre of Robert and his men was the signal for widespread uprising in the north. York was sacked, and a Danish fleet met the forces of Edgar Ætheling and his allies. This persuaded William to march his troops northward and devastate the lands of his enemies. The so-called ‘Harrying of the North’ entered the historical record as one of the most brutal suppressions in English history. At Christmas 1069 William held his court at York, where he ceremonially wore his crown to emphasise the point that there was to be but one king in England.

In the spring of 1070, William returned to the south to put into effect a series of important changes designed to further secure the Conquest, most notably the removal of senior ecclesiastics deemed suspect.

The last Anglo-Norse archbishop of Canterbury,

Senior laymen and senior ecclesiastics were replaced by men of continental extraction

Stigand, was replaced by the Italian Lanfranc, who had made a career for himself in Normandy. Lanfranc was to be William’s alter ego and administer the kingdom while the king was in Normandy. He played the leading part, for example, in the suppression of a 1075 rebellion known as the Revolt of the Earls. Lanfranc was also keen to press for the recognition of Canterbury’s primacy in the ecclesiastical organisation of not just England but also the wider British Isles. There was to be one primate in England, just as there was to be one king in England, and that primate, like that king, would rule from the south.

Reshaping church and nobility

In this one year, the character of the Conquest began to change, as both senior laymen and senior ecclesiastics were replaced by men of continental extraction. No native English bishop or abbot was to be appointed for the remainder of the reign, a policy continued under the Conqueror’s sons, William Rufus (1087–1100) and Henry I (1100–35).

The very character of the ruling elite underwent a profound change during the next decades. It should be remembered, however, that, in large part, we are talking about a southern and midland elite. In the north-east and north-west, for a number of years the dominant families continued to be those who had enjoyed power before 1066, even if during the course of the next century they, too, were to be drawn into the southern orbit.

Odard of Bamburgh, for example, the sheriff of Northumberland in 1130, was descended from the pre-Conquest earls of Bamburgh. He had followed his father, Ligulf of Bamburgh, into the post, and his sons, William and Adam did likewise. His third son, John, was given land in Bamburgh by King Henry II. Ligulf and Odard were names belonging to the house of Bamburgh. Although we cannot know when Odard was born, he was operating as sheriff since at least 1116 and died in 1133 with one son aged 21 or more, so we should assume that he was born no later than 1090. His children were born in the reign of Henry I, therefore, and it is significant that he chose French names for all three of them. In the north of England

it seems probable that much of the way that the Norman conquest was extended was by a cultural assimilation of the existing upper echelons of society into the new, French-speaking elite.

The church also played a key role in the process of Anglicisation of the north. In 1071, William appointed the clerk Walcher as the new bishop of Durham, and built for him a castle from which he might defend himself from the native aristocracy. By 1075, Walcher was made earl of Northumbria, a title he wore in tandem with that of bishop of Durham. Walcher encouraged the development of monasticism in the region, in part, no doubt, out of religious sentiment, but also in part as a deliberate ploy to bring the north within the network of monasteries that, since the 10th century, had played a crucial role in the administrative unification of England.

Bede’s monasteries at Jarrow and Wearmouth were refounded, as was St Wilfrid’s community at Whitby. Walcher’s murder at Gateshead in 1080, along with more than 100 of his troops, brought a swift reprisal. A new castle was built on the north bank of the Tyne and from here (Newcastle) the newly appointed Earl of Northumbria (this time a Norman, Aubrey de Coucy) could begin to bring the lands north of the Tyne under his rule. At Durham, the new bishop, William of St-Calais, disbanded the old community and created a Benedictine monastery. In so doing, he ruptured the political and social structures of the north-east into which the community at Durham had been intimately tied, and opened the way for a further expansion of the Norman conquest into this region of England. As a symbol of the new regime, William rebuilt Durham cathedral in the new Romanesque style, and further fortified the castle.

His successor, Ranulf Flambard, began the process of bringing Northumberland within the English administrative system; it is from his time that we first hear of a sheriff of the territory between the Tyne and the Tees, a certain Roger Picot. The administrative, judicial and military organisation of England was based on the shire, so the appearance of a sheriff in the historical record is crucial evidence that the territory was being absorbed into the kingdom. In the north-east, between the Tyne and the Tees, we can date this moment to about 1095. The sheriff could rule his territory from the royal castle in

Lanfranc, William’s designated archbishop of Canterbury, as imagined by an engraver for Raphael Holinshed’s *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (1577)





Two churches and an Anglo-Saxon settlement were demolished to make room for Norman bishop Herbert de Losinga's new Norwich cathedral



An illumination from the Carleif Bible, created by scribes in Bayeux (his home city) for Bishop William de St-Calais to stock the new Durham cathedral

Castles were central to the process by which the extreme edges of England were drawn into southern rule

the name of the king. Castles were central to the process by which the extreme edges of England were drawn into southern rule – within its walls the occupiers might simultaneously defend themselves from the aggression of the natives and impose on the region the administrative structures which made rule possible and profitable.

Taking control of Cumbria

If the north-east was being subsumed into the administrative structure of the kingdom during the 30 years after the Conquest, in the north-west the integration of Cumbria (comprising Cumberland and Westmorland) went much more slowly. In 1192, William Rufus gave frontier responsibility to Ivo Taillebois, who seems to have brought with him from Lincolnshire English peasants to settle around Carlisle in an attempt, we must presume, to water down the native population who comprised peoples of British, Irish and, above all, Norse extraction. The name of Ivo's deputy, Forne Sigulfson, suggests that the region had a strong Scandinavian element, with connections across the Irish Sea to the Norse-controlled Isle of Man and the cities on the east coast of Ireland.

But even in the 1120s, Cumbria was still outside of the administrative mainstream, with the sheriff of Northumberland being given responsibility for collecting judicial fines at Carlisle and Ranulf Meschin ruling Cumberland and Westmorland outside of the royal jurisdiction. By 1133, however, the English king (his interest in the area aroused by the discovery of a silver mine) had established a bishopric at Carlisle and probably also a sheriff. It may have taken 70 years to bring Cumbria under royal control, but by the 1130s, it was well on the way to being achieved.

The domination by the Normans (who we could perhaps call the New English since by this stage they were no longer invaders into England but natives, many born and raised in the kingdom) stretched into Scottish territory too, even if the Scots were able to resist permanent political domination. At the Scottish court, southern influence was strong. Malcolm Canmore (died 1093) married Margaret of the pre-Conquest English royal dynasty, and three of their sons ruled in turn:

King Edgar (died 1107) acknowledged that he held his throne by the power of William Rufus; King Alexander I (died 1124) was a devotee of the cult of St Cuthbert at Durham and married one of Henry I's many illegitimate daughters; and King David I (died 1153) acquired lands in Northamptonshire, Huntingdonshire, Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire to form a territory known as the honour of Huntingdon.

Two daughters of Malcolm and Margaret married into the top of southern society: Edith-Matilda married King Henry I of England and Mary married Eustace III of Boulogne. Following these liaisons, the Scottish court was populated by men from the south, and the Scots king's administration fashioned itself on English lines. Henry II forced on his Scottish neighbour a subservient role and, while the English king's power was riding high, the Scots king always had to kowtow to him.

The west of Britain was not immune to the attentions of New English domination, either. Wales had been regularly mulcted by the pre-Conquest English kings, and slaving raids were conducted by both sides. After the Conquest, William gave lands on the marches of Wales (Herefordshire, Shropshire and Cheshire) to men who had license to make incursions into Welsh territory. Over the next two centuries, Wales was gradually crushed under English rule as aggressive lords bent on aggrandisement took lands from the Welsh rulers. But resistance was strong and, in the early years, the English lords were able to make permanent inroads only in certain areas. Deheubarth (south Wales) quickly fell under English rule and by the 1090s there was a castle established as far west as Pembroke.

Elsewhere, the English takeover required the resources of the king to bring victory. Powys (north-east Wales) fell to the attentions of Henry II in 1157. Gwynedd (north-west Wales), however, long remained independent of English control. It only fell in 1284 after sustained campaigning by Edward I. More than 200 years since the Hastings, the consequences of the events of 1066 were still being played out. **II**

Stephen Church is professor of medieval history at the University of East Anglia and the author of *King John: England, Magna Carta and the Making of a Tyrant* (Macmillan, 2015)





The Normans extended their dominion into Wales with a massive programme of castle-building. Caldicot, established in 1086 as a motte with two baileys and a deep surrounding ditch, was reinforced in stone around the 13th century

Norman churches

The Normans didn't just change English society – they also transformed the church. **Marc Morris** explores their influence and eight key examples

In 1069 William the Conqueror celebrated Christmas in York, ceremoniously wearing his crown to mark the third anniversary of his coronation. But for the people of York – and, probably, for the Conqueror himself – this was the least merry Christmas of their lives. In recent months the city had been racked by repeated waves of violence and devastated by fire. The cathedral church of York Minster, the likeliest location for the crown-wearing ceremony, stood ruined and roofless – “completely laid waste and burnt down”, according to the contemporary Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.

Three years on from 1066, the Norman conquest was not going according to plan. After his invasion William had hoped to govern a united realm, with English and

Norman subjects living peacefully side by side. But these years had instead been blighted by almost constant English rebellion and Norman repression. The cycle of violence had peaked in Yorkshire that winter with the Conqueror's decision to lay waste the entire region, rendering it incapable of supporting any form of life – his infamous ‘Harrying of the North’.

When William returned south at the start of 1070, it quickly became clear that the earlier policy of accommodating Englishmen was no more. Lay lords who had stood against the new regime had been dispossessed from the first, but now it was the turn of the church.

That spring, over the course of two church councils attended by cardinals sent from Rome especially for the purpose, four of England's 15 bishops were deprived of office,

including the elderly archbishop of Canterbury, Stigand, who was later imprisoned. A similar number of abbots also lost their positions and, in some cases, their liberty. In previous years William had been happy to appoint Englishmen to high positions in the church; after the purge of 1070 such positions went only to continental newcomers. By the time of the king's death in 1087, only one English bishop – the wily and tenacious Wulfstan of Worcester – remained.

The almost total replacement of its top brass within a few years of 1066 had a major impact on the English church, because the newcomers had quite different ideas about the way the church should be governed. In the half-century or so before the Norman conquest, the church in Normandy had been reformed. Zealous monks from elsewhere in



Durham Cathedral is "generally regarded as the epitome of Norman ecclesiastical architecture," says Marc Morris

France, drafted in by earlier Norman dukes, had infused the duchy with a new spiritual rigour. New attitudes were adopted: it was no longer acceptable for churchmen to buy their way into office, or to keep wives and concubines. And new churches were built: laymen founded new monasteries, or refounded old ones, while bishops replaced their ancient cathedrals.

This transformation is almost as apparent today as it was back then. The new buildings were constructed in a wholly novel style – one we refer to as ‘Romanesque’. The contrast with what had gone before was striking – akin to a switch from 2D to 3D. Whereas the walls of earlier churches had been flat expanses, Romanesque churches were built with shafts, arches, niches and galleries – the kind of orderly, sophisticated and monumental

architecture not seen in western Europe since the days of Rome (hence ‘Romanesque’).

In England before 1066 there had been no such revolution. Only one church had been built in the new Romanesque style, namely Westminster Abbey, refounded just before the Conquest by Edward the Confessor, who had spent much of his adult life living in exile in Normandy.

But after 1066, and especially after the purge of 1070, the architectural floodgates burst open. The deposed English archbishop Stigand was replaced by William’s spiritual mentor, Lanfranc of Bec, who immediately began to rebuild Canterbury, modelling the new cathedral on his Norman abbey of Saint-Étienne. Other senior churchmen swiftly followed suit. During the 1070s new cathedrals were begun at Lincoln, Rochester,

Chichester, Salisbury and Winchester, and new abbeys at Canterbury and St Albans.

In some cases, the Normans seized the opportunity to move their cathedrals. The thinking after the Conquest was that bishops should reside in cities, to be close to their flocks (and, no doubt, close to the security of a new Norman castle). So the bishop of Dorchester became the bishop of Lincoln, and the bishop of Sherborne became the bishop of Salisbury. Selsey moved to Chichester, Lichfield to Chester and Elmham (eventually) to Norwich. Here was a change of unprecedented magnitude.

It was not, though, a change necessarily welcomed by the natives. The architectural results may now seem impressive, but for contemporary Englishmen it meant the destruction of their ancient places of worship, some of which had stood since the days of the saints who had founded them. Stories abound of insensitive Norman abbots scorning the reputations of their English predecessors, removing their shrines and (in one notorious case) testing the sanctity of their remains with an ordeal of fire.

“We wretches are destroying the work of the saints, thinking in our insolent pride that we are improving them.” So, according to his biographer, wept Wulfstan of Worcester as the roof was ripped from his old cathedral in 1084.

The Norman rebuilding of England’s major churches was astonishingly swift. By the time of William the Conqueror’s death in 1087, nine of the country’s 15 cathedrals had been torn down, their new Romanesque replacements either under way or already finished. Before William’s fourth son, Henry I, died in 1135, the remaining six had been similarly replaced, along with every major abbey church.

It was a revolution without parallel in the history of English ecclesiastical architecture. Visit any of these churches today and you will not find a single piece of standing Anglo-Saxon masonry. The next new cathedral to be entirely rebuilt after 1066 was not constructed until the early 13th century, when the city of Salisbury was relocated. After that, there was to be no new cathedral till the 17th century – when Wren rebuilt St Paul’s.

Marc Morris is a historian, broadcaster and writer, author of *The Norman Conquest* (Windmill, 2013). You can watch a short film about Norman architecture on his website, at: www.marcmorris.org.uk/p/films.html



1 Jumièges Abbey,
Jumièges, Normandy

2 Abbey of Saint-Étienne,
Caen, Normandy

3 Battle Abbey, Battle,
near Hastings

4 Canterbury Cathedral

5 St Paul's Monastery, Jarrow

6 St Albans Abbey, St Albans

7 Winchester Cathedral

8 Durham Cathedral

1 Jumièges Abbey JUMIÈGES, NORMANDY

Where the model for English Romanesque churches can be seen

Thanks to the Danish conquest of 1016 that gave us King Cnut, the future King Edward the Confessor spent his formative years in exile in Normandy. One of his closest companions during this time was a clerk called Robert Champart, who in 1037 became abbot of Jumièges, a monastery nestled in a loop of the river Seine to the west of Rouen. In 1040 Robert began to rebuild his abbey church in the latest Romanesque style, and the spectacular results can still be appreciated today, albeit in a ruined state.

Important in its own right as one of the finest examples of early Norman architecture, Jumièges is also central to the story of Romanesque designs in England, since it provided the model for the new

church built by Edward the Confessor after his unexpected return to England in 1041: Westminster Abbey. The only major church not rebuilt in the wake of the Norman conquest, Westminster was eventually replaced in the 13th century, but we can tell from excavation that the original building was closely related to Jumièges.

The Confessor's church was all but complete by the time of his death in January 1066, and had been hurriedly dedicated just a few days earlier. Jumièges was also finished by this date, but its dedication was delayed by Norman preparations for invasion. It was eventually consecrated on 1 July 1067, as part of William the Conqueror's victory celebrations.

► www.abbayedejumieges.fr



The design of Edward the Confessor's Westminster Abbey was heavily influenced by Jumièges Abbey, shown here

DREAMSTIME.COM/GETTY IMAGES

2 Abbey of Saint-Étienne

CAEN, NORMANDY

Where William the Conqueror built an abbey to atone for his sins

In the late 1040s, William decided to marry Matilda, daughter of the Count of Flanders. At first the marriage was banned by the pope, because William and Matilda were too closely related, but papal opposition was soon overcome – on condition that the bride and groom each founded a new monastery by way of atonement.

Matilda established the nunnery of La Trinité in Caen. William's abbey of Saint-Étienne, also in Caen, was far more cutting edge, borrowing the best elements from earlier Romanesque buildings such as

Jumièges. Its first abbot was Lanfranc of Bec, William's spiritual advisor; he became archbishop of Canterbury after the Conquest, and Saint-Étienne became the model for much that followed in England.

The Conqueror was buried at Saint-Étienne (now known as the Abbaye aux Hommes) in 1087. His bloated corpse burst when the monks tried to cram it into its stone sarcophagus, and the stench caused the congregation to rush home.

► <http://caen.fr>

3 Battle Abbey BATTLE, NEAR HASTINGS

Where William built a monastery to commemorate his famous victory over Harold Godwinson's English army

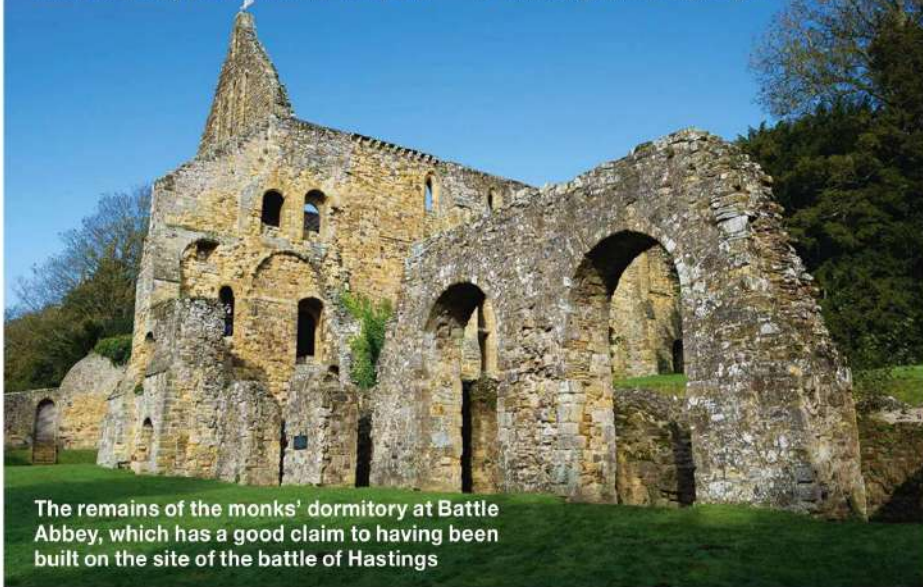
On 14 October 1066 an English army led by the recently crowned Harold Godwinson engaged the Norman invasion force led by William the Conqueror. The outcome, is, of course well known. The two armies met at a place seven miles north-west of Hastings that, at the time, had no very obvious name. Today it is known as Battle.

Before the fighting began, William had sworn that, if God granted him victory, he would found a monastery. At least, such was the story told by the chronicler at Battle Abbey, the church subsequently built by the Conqueror to commemorate his triumph and atone for the bloodshed. Founding a church in such circumstances was not unusual: Cnut had done the same after his decisive victory at Assandun in 1016, and

it was recommended in a list of penances drawn up by the bishops of Normandy for those who had fought at Hastings, probably in 1067 and certainly by 1070. The church that William commissioned was destroyed during the Reformation, but excavation shows that it was a modest building with a nave measuring 36 metres.

The claim that the abbey was built on the site of the battle is a strong one, despite attempts to discredit it. According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, written before 1100 by an Englishman who had lived at William's court, the Conqueror established his abbey "on the very spot where God granted him the conquest of England".

► www.english-heritage.org.uk



The remains of the monks' dormitory at Battle Abbey, which has a good claim to having been built on the site of the battle of Hastings

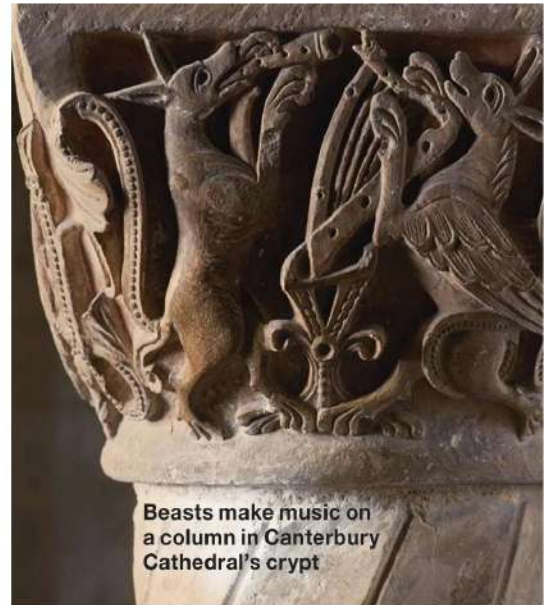
ALAMY

The abbey of Saint-Étienne, begun by William the Conqueror in 1063, and (below) a statue of William's wife, Matilda



4 Canterbury Cathedral

Where an Anglo-Saxon cathedral became a Norman masterpiece



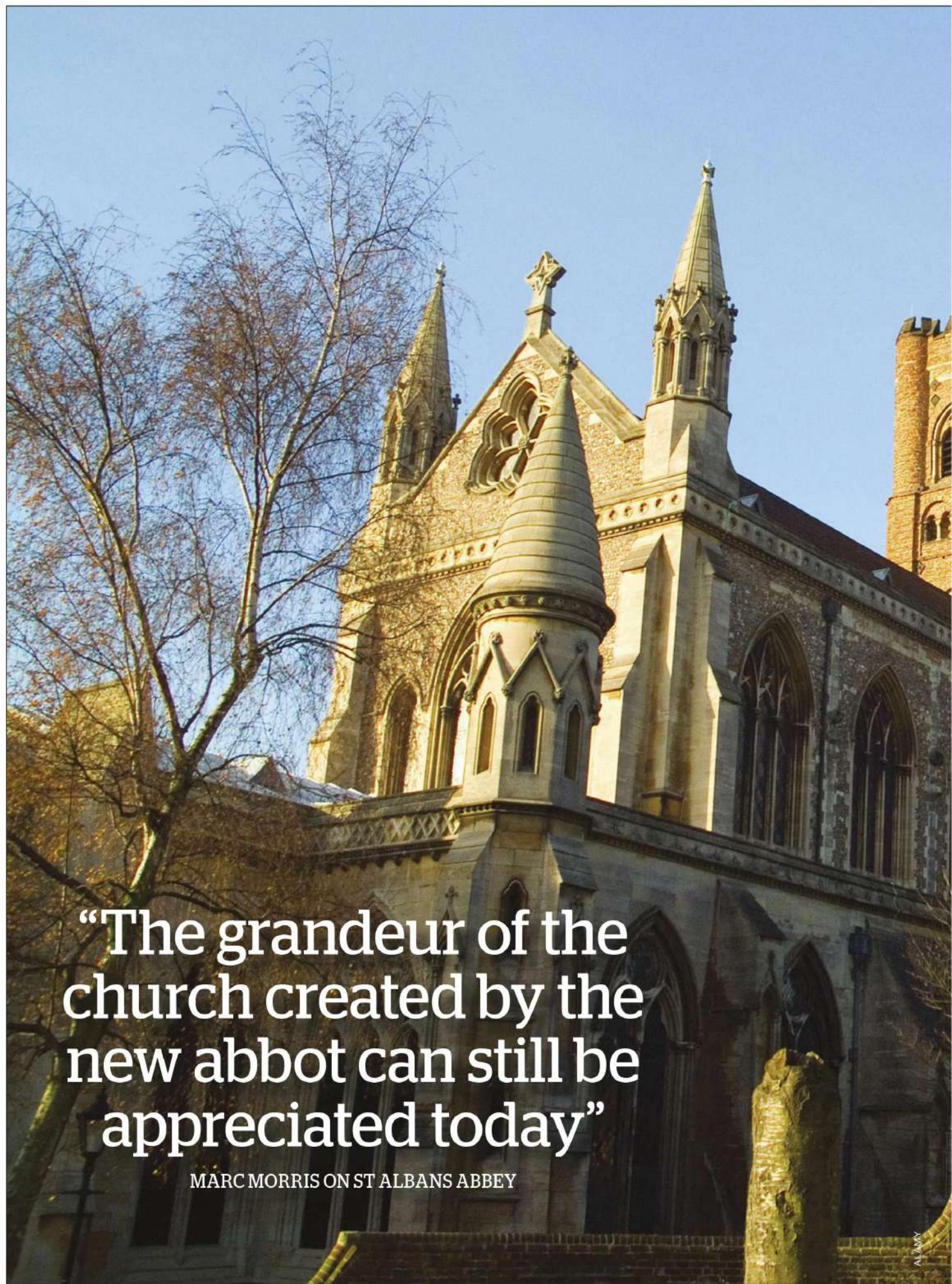
Beasts make music on a column in Canterbury Cathedral's crypt

The first major church to be razed and replaced after the Norman conquest was also the most important: Canterbury Cathedral – then, as now, England's principal metropolitan seat. The old Anglo-Saxon cathedral had been one of the largest and most impressive in Europe, its history stretching back to the time of Saint Augustine. But in 1067 it was damaged by fire, and when Lanfranc arrived to take up his post as archbishop three years later he showed no interest in restoring it. The ancient fabric was swept away and a new Norman building rose in its place, so swiftly that it was ready for dedication in 1077. "You do not know which to admire more," wrote William of Malmesbury half a century later, "the beauty or the speed".

Lanfranc was similarly insensitive to English tradition when it came to Canterbury's shrines and relics, removing them as a prelude to construction and placing them in an inaccessible upstairs room, where they seem to have remained for the rest of his time in office.

Extensive rebuilding in later centuries means that next to nothing remains today of Lanfranc's cathedral, parts of which were already being replaced during the time of his successor, Anselm. However, the columns of the crypt, their capitals richly carved with animals, date from this period.

► www.canterbury-cathedral.org



“The grandeur of the church created by the new abbot can still be appreciated today”

MARC MORRIS ON ST ALBANS ABBEY



St Albans Abbey, with the Norman tower in the background. The Normans began rebuilding the Anglo-Saxon abbey in 1077 using bricks from the nearby ruins of the roman town of Verulamium



5 St Paul's Monastery

JARROW

Where an important northern monastery was refounded

Anyone who thinks the sweeping social change that occurred after 1066 would have happened without the Norman conquest would do well to consider the fate of the church in the north of England. Once it had been a region full of monasteries – witness the Venerable Bede and the Lindisfarne Gospels – but these had been wiped out in the ninth and 10th centuries after the arrival of the Vikings.

By the late 10th century the Vikings themselves were gone, and the north was notionally ruled by the kings of a newly united England. A revival of northern monasticism, however, had to wait for the coming of the Normans. Soon after the Conquest, a Norman knight named Reinfrid saw the ancient ruined abbey at Whitby and decided to become a monk at Evesham. A short time later, in 1073, he set out with two like-minded English monks on a mission to refound the northern monasteries described by Bede. They began at Jarrow (where a stretch of wall survives from one of the monastic ranges), but other houses were soon revived at Selby, Whitby, Durham and York. There is no better example of how conquerors and religious reformers marched in step.

► www.english-heritage.org.uk

The Venerable Bede, theologian and historian, depicted in an English manuscript of 1175



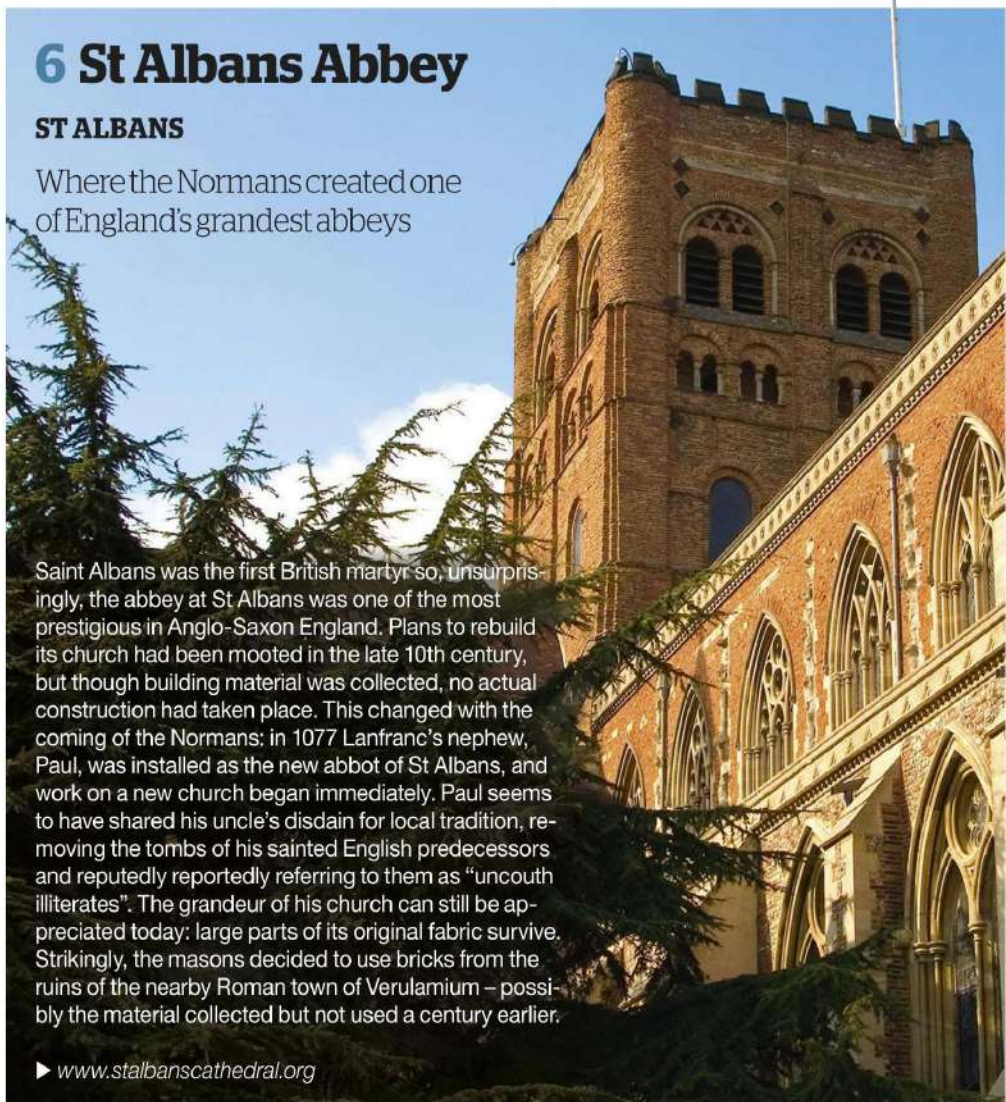
6 St Albans Abbey

ST ALBANS

Where the Normans created one of England's grandest abbeys

Saint Albans was the first British martyr so, unsurprisingly, the abbey at St Albans was one of the most prestigious in Anglo-Saxon England. Plans to rebuild its church had been mooted in the late 10th century, but though building material was collected, no actual construction had taken place. This changed with the coming of the Normans: in 1077 Lanfranc's nephew, Paul, was installed as the new abbot of St Albans, and work on a new church began immediately. Paul seems to have shared his uncle's disdain for local tradition, removing the tombs of his sainted English predecessors and reputedly reportedly referring to them as "uncouth illiterates". The grandeur of his church can still be appreciated today: large parts of its original fabric survive. Strikingly, the masons decided to use bricks from the ruins of the nearby Roman town of Verulamium – possibly the material collected but not used a century earlier.

► www.stalbanscathedral.org



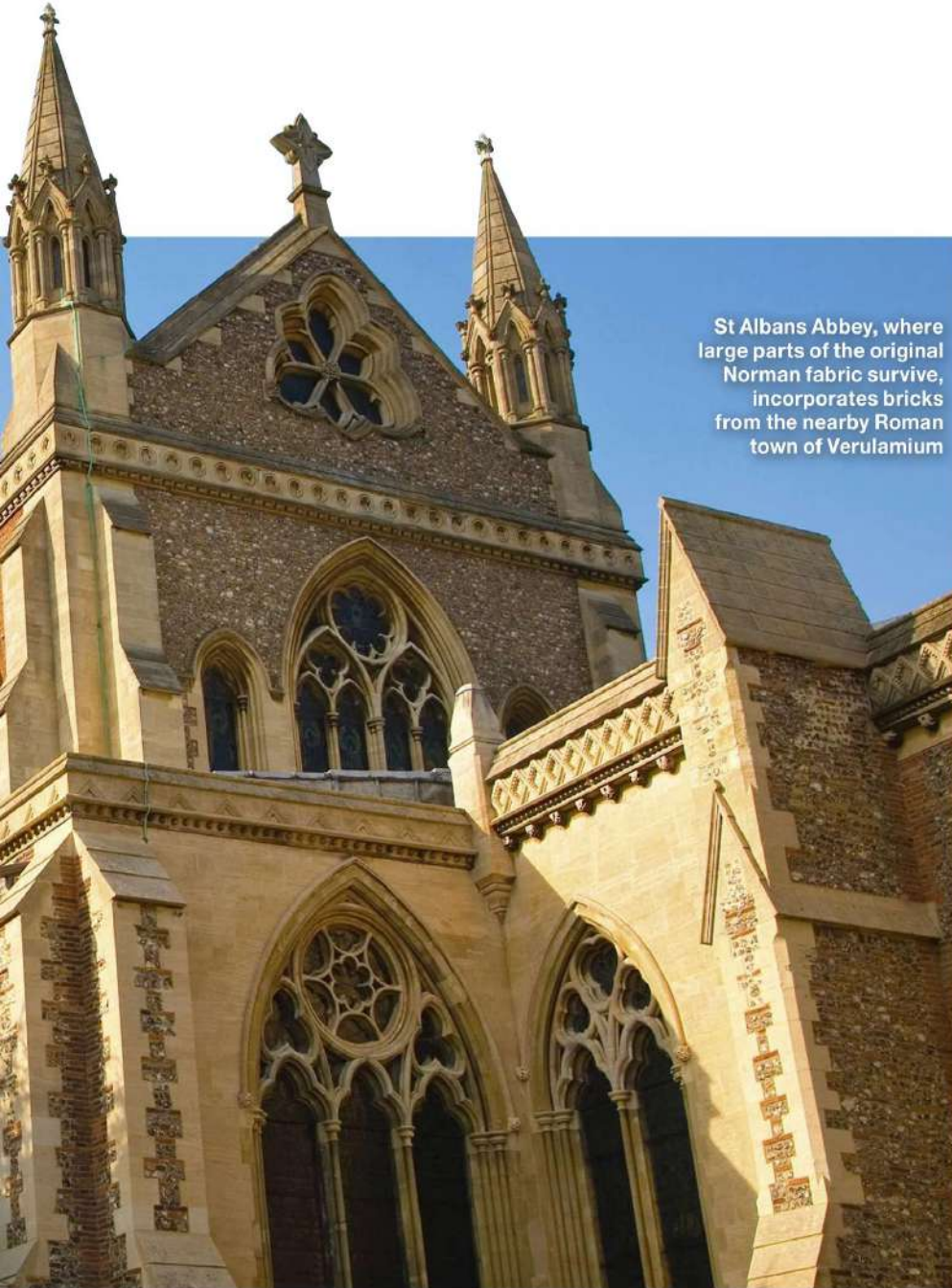
7 Winchester Cathedral

Where William built on a scale unrivalled in northern Europe

Winchester's north transept, which is almost unchanged from the original building constructed in the 11th century



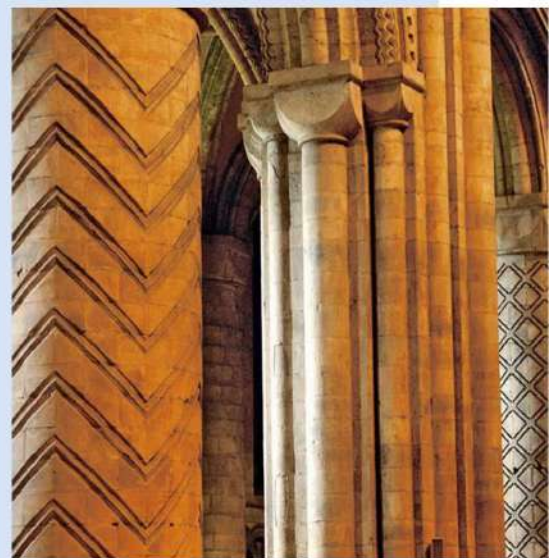
THE ART ARCHIVE/ALAMY/PETER ORR PHOTOGRAPHY



St Albans Abbey, where large parts of the original Norman fabric survive, incorporates bricks from the nearby Roman town of Verulamium

8 Durham Cathedral

Where Norman ecclesiastical architecture reached its zenith



Durham Cathedral's highly decorated columns are carved with spirals, zigzags and lozenges

Big they may have been, but the new Norman churches built immediately after 1066 were not necessarily of the highest quality. During the 12th century, several major examples (most notably Winchester) suffered collapsed towers; contemporaries attributed such failures to high winds and earthquakes, but these events probably had more to do with jerry-building, as the first generation of Norman patrons raced to make their mark.

In the second generation of buildings, however, we see the quality of craftsmanship improve. This is clearest at Durham, begun in 1093 and generally regarded as the epitome of Norman ecclesiastical architecture. Its great glory is its rib-vaulted roof, the earliest of its kind outside Spain and the Holy Roman Empire.

Durham also differs from earlier Norman churches in being highly decorated: its columns are carved with spirals, zigzags and lozenges, its doors surrounded by chevrons. Decoration had been commonplace on Anglo-Saxon churches before 1066, so its appearance at Durham can be seen as early evidence that the two cultures, conquering and conquered, were beginning to fuse. **H**

► www.durhamcathedral.co.uk

Each new abbey and cathedral begun in England after the Conquest was larger than the one before. Looking at nave lengths, for instance, we can see a steady progression during the 1070s: Canterbury measures 56 metres, Lincoln 57 and St Albans 64. One can well imagine their respective abbots and bishops trying to surpass one other.

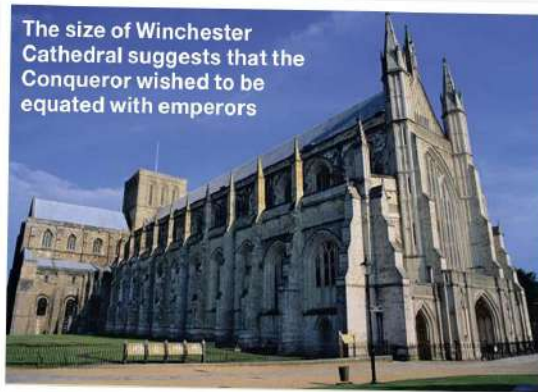
Even seen against this trend, however, the new cathedral begun at Winchester in 1079 stands out as exceptional. Its nave, which stretched to an astonishing 81 metres, was not only the longest in England by a very considerable margin, but was also the longest in northern Europe – larger even than the cathedral raised earlier in the 11th century by the Holy Roman Emperor at Speyer. Only St Peter's in Rome, built by the emperor Constantine in the fourth century AD, was larger.

Winchester was, of course, the ancient capital of Wessex, a city

that in the 11th century was second only to London in terms of importance. As such we can easily believe that the desire to build on such a gargantuan scale originated with William the Conqueror himself, suggesting an ambition to be regarded in the same light as emperors past and present. As at St Albans, despite later rebuilding, much of the original Norman fabric at Winchester survives.

► www.winchester-cathedral.org.uk

The size of Winchester Cathedral suggests that the Conqueror wished to be equated with emperors



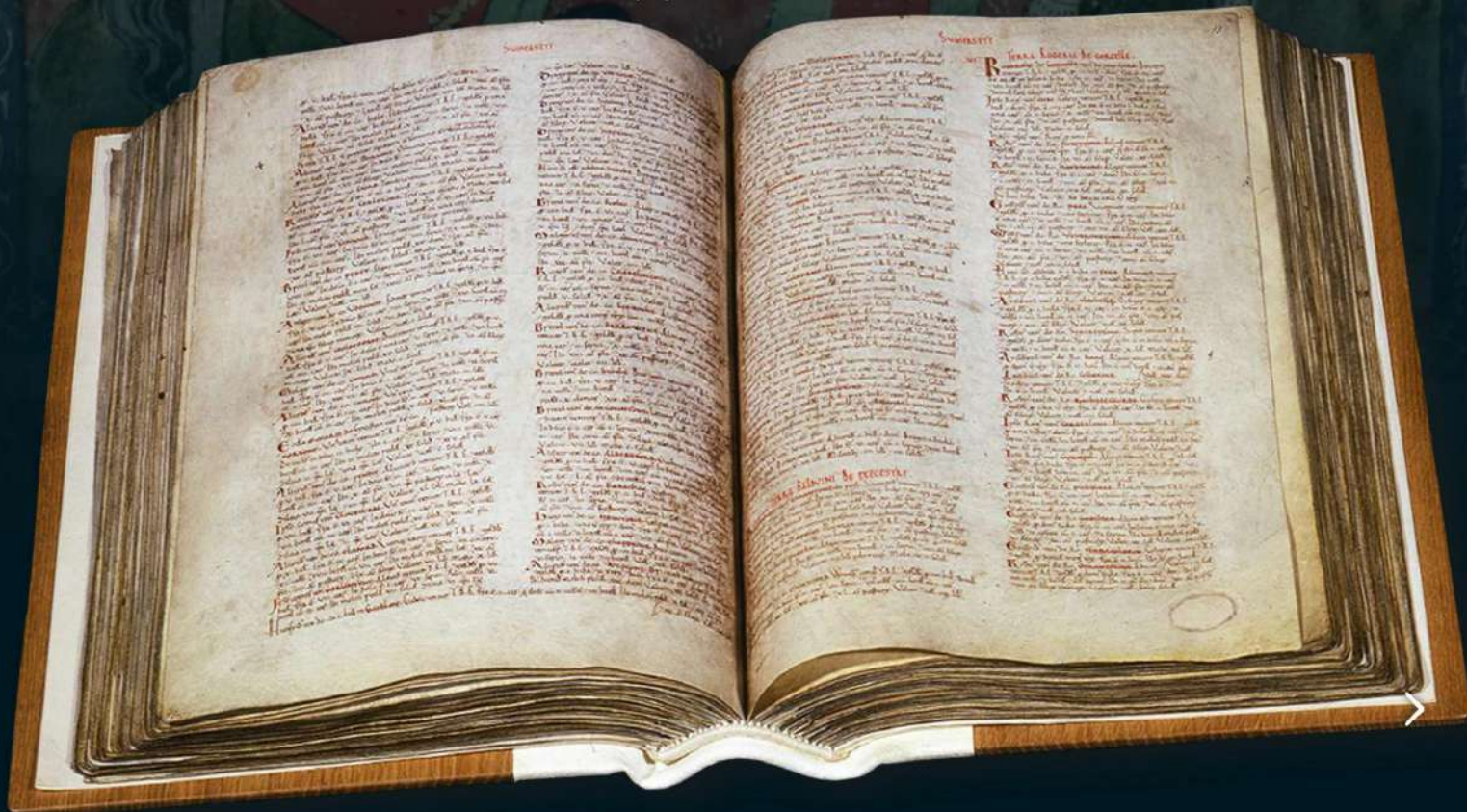
DOMESDAY BOOK

THE MOST IMPORTANT DOCUMENT IN ENGLISH HISTORY?

Why was Domesday Book made? What does it say about the impact of the Normans on England? And what more can we learn from it? **Stephen Baxter** considers the big questions about this pivotal work



ABOVE: The 12th-century *Book of the Laws of Ancient Kings* shows William the Conqueror riding with his soldiers.
 BELOW: *Domesday Book*, William's great "instrument of control", on display at the National Archives, London





A c1030 calendar shows Anglo-Saxon farmers threshing corn

What's the background to Domesday?

In 1085, William the Conqueror faced the greatest crisis of his life and reign. This, of course, came two decades after his famous invasion and conquest of 1066. For the next 20 years he and his Norman followers colonised England – but then, in the 1080s, William's position as king began to look vulnerable. His eldest son, Robert, was in rebellion and courting allies in northern France for an attack on Normandy, and King Cnut of Denmark was preparing to invade England in alliance with the count of Flanders.

William's response was characteristically vigorous. According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, he mobilised the largest "force of mounted men and infantry" ever seen in England, compelled his vassals "to provision the army each in proportion to his land," and scorched the coastline to prevent his enemies from gaining a foothold – the kind of foothold that his own army had found in 1066. The atmosphere of England in 1085 must have resembled 1588 with the Armada on its way, or 1940 with Hitler's forces poised for invasion.

Then, at Christmas, the king called his advisers to a council at Gloucester. There, he "had deep thought and very deep discussion with his council about this country – how it was occupied or with what sort of people". He then "sent his men over all England into every shire" to conduct a survey: "so very narrowly did he have it investigated, that there was no single hide of land, nor indeed (it is a shame to relate but it seemed no shame to him to do) one ox nor one cow nor one pig which was there left out, and not put down in his record; and all these records were brought to him afterwards".

How did William imagine that a book would help him resist a Viking invasion?

Faced with the prospect of political and military catastrophe, the Conqueror, one of the greatest military commanders of the 11th century, unleashed a bureaucratic fact-finding exercise. Why? How did he imagine that a book would help him resist a Viking invasion?

Why was Domesday Book made?

The key to understanding why it was produced is establishing *how* it was made. The first step was to work out logistics. The kingdom was divided into seven 'circuits', most with five shires. Commissioners were appointed to conduct the survey in each circuit and, to ensure neutrality, they each served on circuits in which they did not themselves hold land. They were given terms of reference: a checklist of questions to answer for every parcel of property. Who held it in 1066? Who holds it now? How many people live there? How much livestock, woodland and meadow has it? What is its tax rating? How much money does it generate? Landholders and royal officials had a few weeks to gather the necessary information.

Then came the main event: the Domesday inquest, conducted at extraordinary meetings



of shire courts throughout the kingdom. These must have been exciting and dramatic occasions. Every landholder was called to give evidence before commissioners and panels of local jurors. This transformed the inquest into a political drama. It is known that some landholders even tried to pack Domesday juries with clients who could be relied on to support their verdicts, with varying degrees of success.

There must have been a moment of hushed excitement each time the crucial question was asked at the inquest: "Who holds the land now?" Thousands of verdicts were challenged, and not even the most powerful lords were immune. For example, Picot, the sheriff of Cambridgeshire, suffered a torrid time at the inquest. The monks of Ely later remembered him as "a hungry lion, a prowling wolf, a crafty fox, a filthy pig, a shameless dog," and to judge from the number of challenges to his title registered in Domesday Book, they said as much at the inquest.

Once the inquest hearings were complete, the commissioners and their scribes wrote up the results. One of their returns survives in its original form, covering the south-western

shires: Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, Wiltshire and Dorset. Although called the 'Exon Domesday', it is now known to have been written at Old Sarum, a castle-and-cathedral complex near Salisbury. As we shall see, this was a crucial focal point for the whole survey.

Finally, a single scribe was assigned the task of turning all seven circuit returns into a single document. This volume is now known as Great Domesday Book. The scribe probably began in late summer 1086 while results from the inquest were still coming in. Scholars estimate it would have taken at least a year to write. It is possible that news of William's death, on 9 September 1087, brought the scribe's work to an abrupt end. This would explain why he did not write up the return for the eastern circuit, which also survives in its original form and is known as Little Domesday Book. 'Domesday Book' is the collective term for these two volumes: the Great and Little Domesday Book.

Why is it called Domesday Book?

During the lifetimes of the Conqueror and his sons, royal officials employed politically correct language when describing Domesday

Book. They called it a "descriptio (survey) of all England" (in 1086), a "volumen (volume) kept in the king's Treasury in Winchester," the "king's book," the "book of the Exchequer," the "book of Winchester," and so on.

But Richard fitzNigel, treasurer to Henry II, wrote in the late 1170s that it was popularly known by a very different name: "The natives [ie Englishmen] call this book 'Domesdei', that is, the day of judgment. This is a metaphor. For just as no judgment of that final severe and terrible trial can be evaded by any subterfuge, so when any controversy arises in the kingdom concerning the matters contained in the book, and recourse is made to the book, its word cannot be denied or set aside with impunity."

The name Domesday Book is therefore a function of its awesome reputation among the English. It invokes the Day of Judgment described in the Book of Revelation.

What was the purpose of the survey?

This remains deeply controversial. Many historians have argued it was all about the land-tax, known as the geld. That is, of course, logical. William desperately needed cash to

finance his wars. Tax records from William's reign reveal that many landholders enjoyed tax breaks and loopholes, so there was a pressing need to make tax collection more efficient.

The survey's terms of reference support this hypothesis. Commissioners were instructed to establish the geld liability of every parcel of land in England, and to collect further information that would enable them to establish that it could pay more. Every entry in Domesday Book supplies that information. A contemporary eyewitness account says that: "The land was vexed with much violence arising from the collection of royal taxes" during the process. Surely, therefore, Domesday Book was a tax book?

The problem is that its layout makes it a spectacularly unhelpful guide to the logistics of taxation. To collect the land-tax efficiently, royal officials needed information arranged in geographical order, hundred by hundred and village by village, so they would know exactly where to go and how much to collect. But Domesday's main organising principle is personal, not geographical. Each shire begins with a numbered list, starting with the king and then listing the names of "tenants-in-chief" – lords who held land directly from the king. The holdings of the king and tenants-in-chief are then listed in the same order, under numbered headings, in the pages that follow. There are no totals and no indexes. Any tax official trying to use this information laid out this way would have quickly lost the will to live because, as historians are painfully aware, it can take days to calculate the tax liability of particular areas or landholders, even with the benefit of modern editions with indexes.

The structure of Domesday Book does, however, make it an extraordinarily effective instrument of political control. Its tables of contents and numbered headings imply that all land was held either directly by the king or from him by tenants-in-chief. It therefore enshrines a radically new political principle that lay at the heart of the Conqueror's regime: that the king claimed to be the source of all tenure. It both asserts that principle and made it manageable. Armed with Domesday Book, King William could threaten to dispossess a recalcitrant baron in a matter of minutes. It is not hard to see how that would have brought comfort to a king who needed baronial loyalty more than ever.

This form of political control was also potentially very profitable, for the king could also use his position as the source of all tenure to generate new streams of income. For example, if a baron died, the king could demand the payment of a relief, a kind of death duty paid by an heir to enter into their inheritance; or he could auction off the right to marry the widows or heiresses of deceased

Domesday Book is the most complete survey of a pre-industrial society anywhere in the world

barons, with their lands, to the highest bidder; or if a bishop or abbot died, they could choose to delay the appointment of their successors and rake in the profits of their estates during the resulting vacancy. These forms of income are known to historians as 'feudal incidents'. Later texts demonstrate that William's sons, kings William II and Henry I, generated enormous sums of money from them.

So was the Domesday survey and Domesday Book intended to improve yields from the land-tax, or from feudal incidents? There is a solution to this problem which embraces both possibilities. Here it is essential to register a distinction between the survey and Domesday Book itself. It is known that the survey did generate information set out in ways that were useful for the management of taxation.

For example, Exon Domesday is bound up with tax lists, which were updated in 1086, and other texts in the collection demonstrate that the Domesday survey for the south-western shires generated documents laid out in geographic order, one hundred at a time – the format most useful for collecting the land tax. The commissioners from other circuits are known to have done the same thing. The structure of Domesday Book, however, organised within each shire by tenants-in-chief, would have made the management of feudal incidents more efficient.

So by extracting information in different formats at each stage of the process, the king could achieve several objectives: creating a more secure land-tax base, and a formidable instrument of political and financial control over his barons.

Why did the barons accede to it?

The Domesday survey was completed with astonishing speed – within six months of the Gloucester council. This could not have been achieved without the active co-operation of the nobility. So what was in it for them? Something that they had yearned for throughout the long period during which England had been colonised was security of title. The Domesday inquest created a great public stage on which to act out the ritual completion of the process of

colonisation, and the records of the inquest constituted unassailable title to those loyal to the king.

In other words, the Domesday survey was a hard-nosed deal between the king and his barons. That deal was sealed at Old Sarum. According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle King William travelled there on 1 August 1086, and "his councillors came to him, and all the people occupying land who were of any account over all England, no matter whose vassals they might be; and they all submitted to him and became his vassals, and swore oaths of allegiance". This extraordinary event was most likely the climax to the Domesday survey. Exon Domesday was written at Old Sarum, and it was almost certainly there that all the records of the survey were delivered to the king.

Those records strengthened William's tax base and articulated the principle that he was the source of all tenure in England with astonishing precision. But they also constituted irrefutable evidence of the barons' title to property. That was enough to persuade them to swear allegiance and pay homage to the king. They did so in return for the land that William had granted them – with those rights now enshrined in the greatest charter of confirmation ever made in the medieval world.

Why is Domesday Book so important?

It is the earliest English document preserved by the government that created it. That makes it England's earliest bureaucratic instrument. But its importance extends well beyond the origins of English red tape. Domesday Book is the most complete survey of a pre-industrial society anywhere in the world. It enables us to reconstruct the politics, government, society and economy of 11th-century England with greater precision than is possible for almost any other pre-modern polity. Given the extent to which our knowledge of our past depends upon it, few would deny it is the single most important document in England's history.

Does Domesday Book help explain the causes of the Norman conquest?

It certainly proves that pre-Conquest England was rich and effectively administered. Two popular misconceptions are that England before the Norman conquest was in the 'Dark Ages' – in other words, backward – and that the Normans began the process of bringing it into the light. Forget those ideas. England's economy was already not so much developing as highly developed. The population was large – there were at least two million people in Domesday England. In fact, it is likely that William the Conqueror ruled as many people as Henry VIII.

The landscape was intensively exploited. About 90 per cent of places on the modern map

xxvii. TERRA Willelmi Loveth.

Willelmus Loveth ten de rege. iii. cap. tpe de Burworp. tpe. e. iii. cap. In dno. e. una. 7 vi. uill. cu. vi. bord hnt. ii. cap. Valut. x. sol. Modo. xxx. sol. d.
De. W. ten **Tedricwode**. Ibi. quanto. I. h. t. ii. cap. Ibi. ii. sochi cu. alus. ii. hnt. i. cap. Ibi. x. ac. pa. Valut. iii. sol. d. hnt. tpe. Soca. iacet. ad Bugedone. an. p. p. f. Modo. x. sol. d.
De. W. ten. v. cap. tpe in **Sessweten**. I. h. t. quant. Ibi. v. cap. In dno. e. i. cap. 7 vi. uill. cu. ii. sochi hnt. i. cap. 7 dimid. Valut. iii. sol. d. Modo. x. sol. d. hnt. e. in **franelon** **Wapen**.

xxviii. TERRA Godfridi Alselin.

Godfridus Alselin ten de rege. vi. cap. tpe in **Moxone**. 7 **Normann** de eo. I. h. t. quant. Ibi. vi. cap. In dno. f. ii. cap. 7 ii. serui. 7 xvi. uill. cu. i. sochi 7 i. liba hnt. iii. bord hnt. vi. cap. Silua. Ibi. iii. quant. Iq. 7 ii. qe. lat. Valut. lx. sol. d. Modo. c. sol. d.
De. N. ten de. G. in **Gostred**. iii. cap. tpe. I. h. t. quant. Ibi. ii. cap. In dno. e. dimid. car. cu. i. serui. 7 iii. uill. cu. ii. bord hnt. i. cap. Silua. iii. quant. Iq. 7 ii. qe. lat. Valut. 7 uat. xx. sol. d.
De. N. ten de. G. in **Chetwarp**. i. cap. tpe. Ibi. f. ii. cap. I. h. t. Ibi. i. sochi cu. ii. uill. 7 i. bord hnt. i. cap. Ibi. x. ac. pa. Valut. v. sol. d. Modo. vi. sol. d.
De. N. ten de. G. xii. cap. tpe in **Billesdane**. I. h. t. quant. Ibi. xii. cap. In dno. nil fuit nec. e. Ibi. iii. sochi cu. iii. uill. 7 ii. bord hnt. ii. cap. Ibi. x. ac. pa.
De hac tpe ten. iii. milites. vii. capuat. dnt. in dno hnt. iii. cap. 7 xi. uill. cu. ii. bord hnt. ii. cap. dimid. Toru. ualut. l. v. sol. d. Modo. lx. sol. d.
De. N. ten de. G. x. cap. tpe in **houestone**. I. h. t. quant. Ibi. vi. cap. In dno. e. i. cap. 7 ii. uill. cu. ii. uill. 7 i. bord hnt. iii. cap. Ibi. vii. ac. pa. Valut. xx. sol. d. Modo. xxx. sol. d. hanc tpe. tota. tenet. sochi cu. saca. 7 soca.

xxix. TERRA Godfridi de Wapen.

Godfridus de Wapen ten de rege. vi. cap. tpe in **Wapen**. I. h. t. quant. Ibi. vi. cap. In dno. e. i. cap. 7 ii. uill. cu. v. bord hnt. iii. cap. Silua. Ibi. i. quant. Iq. 7 ii. qe. lat. Valut. 7 uat. xx. sol. d. hanc tpe. deb. p. **Wapen** p. comutatione. uille. q. uocat. **Wapen**. hanc tpe. tenet. **De. G. ten**. iii. cap. tpe. 7 dnt. in **Wapen**. I. h. t. quant. Ibi. iii. cap. In dno. e. i. cap. 7 dim. 7 iii. uill. cu. i. sochi 7 i. bord hnt. i. cap. Ibi. molin. de. ii. sol. d. 7 iii. ac. pa. 7 iii. ac. silue. Valut. 7 uat. x. sol. d. **Leuun** libe. ten. **Infranelon** **Wapen**.
Ipe. G. ten **Medelstone**. Ibi. f. vi. hnt. 7 una. cap. tpe. 7 una. bouata. In una. qe. bda. f. xiii. cap. tpe. 7 dimid. In dno. f. iii. cap. 7 iii. serui. 7 xx. uill. cu. ii. p. p. 7 xii. bord hnt. vi. cap. 7 dim. **Mercat** real. xx. sol. 7 ii. molin. xx. v. sol. d. Ibi. xx. ac. pa. Silua. i. quant. Iq. 7 ii. qe. lat. Valut. c. sol. d. modo. vii. lib. hnt. q. adiac. hnt. bnt. In **fredebi**. xx. cap. tpe. 7 xxx. ac. pa.
In Wordebi. i. cap. tpe. 7 dim. 7 dimid. bouata. 7 ii. ac. pa.
In Burzone. xii. cap. tpe. i. bouata. min. 7 xii. ac. pa.
In Chetwarp. vii. cap. tpe. 7 vi. ac. pa.
In Churchbi. xxv. cap. tpe. In **Sistenebi**. ii. cap. tpe. 7 dimid.
In Eftewelle. vi. cap. tpe. 7 x. ac. pa. In **Goutrebi**. vi. cap. tpe.
In hnt. f. I. h. t. fuer. xl. vii. cap. tpe. 7 x. ac. pa.
Modo f. Ibi. c. sochi cu. x. uill. 7 xii. bord hnt. xl. iii. cap. Valut. tot. qdo. recep. iii. lib. x. sol. d. Modo. xx. lib. 7 x. sol. d. hanc tpe. tenet. **Leuun** f. **Leuun** I. h. t. cu. saca. 7 soca.

In Alene f. vii. cap. tpe. ii. bouata. min. q. p. n. d. **Medelstone**. Ibi. fuer. v. cap. tpe. **Modo**. xvi. sochi hnt. Ibi. v. cap. 7 vi. ac. pa. Valut. x. sol. d. modo. xl. sol. d. **In Gostred** **Wapen**.

Water ten de. G. vii. cap. tpe in **Wapen**. Ibi. fuer. vi. cap. In dno. f. li. 7 iii. serui. 7 x. uill. 7 iii. bord cu. ii. cap. Ibi. molin. de. xvi. den. 7 xvi. ac. pa. Valut. x. sol. d. m. xxx. sol. d.

Afrid ten de. G. ii. cap. tpe in **Wapen**. Ibi. fuer. iii. cap. In dno. e. i. cap. 7 ii. serui. 7 x. uill. cu. ii. bord hnt. ii. cap. Valut. x. sol. d. modo. xx. sol. d.

Robt ten de. G. in **Wapen**. i. cap. tpe. Ibi. e. i. bord. Valut. 7 uat. xii. den. d.

Aluun ten de. G. in **Wapen**. i. cap. tpe. Ibi. f. ii. cap. 7 modo. similis. e. cu. ii. uill. 7 i. bord. Valut. 7 uat. v. sol. d.

Aluun ten de. G. in **Wapen**. i. cap. tpe. **Vasta** e. **Wapen**. **Buter** ten de. G. xii. cap. tpe. **In Gostred** **Wapen**. Ibi. f. i. cap. tpe in **pichewelle** **Wapen**. Ibi. fuer. x. cap. In dno. f. iii. cap. 7 xii. serui. 7 vii. uill. cu. p. p. 7 xvi. sochi 7 x. bord hnt. xii. cap. Ibi. molin. de. iii. den. 7 l. ac. pa. Valut. xl. sol. d. modo. iii. lib. **Ordmar** libe. tenet. I. h. t.

In Godorp f. iii. cap. tpe. 7 dim. **Soca** **Infranelon** **Wapen**. de **pichewelle** 7 de **Sumerdebie**. Ibi. fuer. iii. cap. Ibi. e. i. cap. cu. ii. bord. 7 iii. ac. pa. Valut. 7 uat. x. sol. d.

In Burgo. e. i. cap. tpe. Ibi. f. ii. cap. **Soca** de **pichewelle**. Valut. 7 uat. v. sol. d. **In Gostred** **Wapen**.

Witl ten de. G. in **Wapen**. x. cap. tpe. Ibi. fuer. vii. cap. In dno. f. ii. 7 xvi. uill. cu. ii. uill. 7 i. bord hnt. vii. cap. Ibi. molin. de. x. sol. 7 xl. ac. pa. Valut. iii. lib. modo. iii. lib.

Dem ten de. G. **Bopone** cu. **Soca** **Soca**. Ibi. f. v. cap. tpe. Ibi. fuer. iii. cap. Ibi. x. sochi hnt. iii. cap. Ibi. xl. ac. pa. Valut. v. sol. d. modo. xx. sol. d. **Leuun** libe. tenet.

Afrid ten de. G. in **Wapen**. vi. cap. tpe. Ibi. fuer. ii. cap. In dno. e. una. 7 v. sochi cu. ii. uill. 7 i. bord hnt. iii. cap. Ibi. xvi. ac. pa. Valut. xii. sol. d. modo. xx. sol. d.

h. q. tra e. de comutatione **Wapen**.

Radulf ten de. G. in **Wapen**. vi. cap. tpe. Ibi. in dno. iii. cap. 7 vi. uill. cu. iii. bord hnt. i. cap. Ibi. xx. ac. pa.

Rainer ten de. G. in **Wapen**. ii. cap. tpe. **Valer**. vii. lib. Ibi. in dno. i. cap. 7 dim. 7 ii. sochi cu. iii. uill. hnt. i. cap. 7 dim. Ibi. x. ac. pa. Valut. xx. sol. d.

Witl **Roger** ten de. G. vii. cap. tpe. 7 ii. bouata. in **Wapen**. **Tone**. 7 iac. ad **Medelstone**. Ibi. fuer. v. cap. In dno. e. dim. cap. 7 x. sochi cu. ii. bord hnt. v. cap. Ibi. xxx. ac. pa. Valut. xxx. sol. d. modo. xl. sol. d. **Leuun** libe. tenet.

Robt ten de. G. in **Wapen**. iii. cap. tpe. **Infranelon** **Wapen**. tpe. 7 dim. Ibi. fuer. iii. cap. 7 dim. In dno. e. i. cap. 7 iii. sochi cu. v. uill. 7 i. bord hnt. ii. cap. Ibi. x. ac. pa. Valut. v. sol. d.

Aluun ten de. G. in **Wapen**. i. cap. tpe. 7 dimid. **Soca**. Ibi. fuer. i. cap. **Modo** e. Ibi. i. uill. 7 ii. ac. pa. 7 v. ac. silue. Valut. 7 uat. v. sol. d. hnt. tpe. de comutatione **Wapen**.

In dno f. ii. cap. tpe. 7 dim. Ibi. iii. sochi. **Soca** de **pichewelle**.

xx. TERRA Godfridi de Wapen.

Godfridus de Wapen ten de rege. ii. cap. tpe in **Wapen**. Ibi. fuer. ii. cap. Ibi. vii. sochi cu. i. uill. 7 i. bord hnt. i. cap. Ibi. molin. de. v. sol. d. 7 ii. den. 7 iii. ac. pa. Valut. vii. sol. d. m. xii. sol. d.

xxi. TERRA Godfridi de Wapen.

Godfridus de Wapen ten de rege. iii. cap. tpe in **Wapen**. Ibi. fuer. i. cap. In dno. e. i. cap. 7 ii. serui. 7 iii. uill. cu. ii. bord hnt. i. cap. Ibi. vii. ac. pa. Valut. xx. sol. d. **Vasta** f. **Wapen** ten de **Wapen**.



of England south of the Tees are recorded in Domesday Book. There was also heavy investment in agriculture. Watermills were the most economically important machines in 11th-century Europe: Domesday records 6,000. It also records that 650,000 oxen ploughed England's fields. That was enough to cultivate about 3.2 million hectares (eight million acres) of land. A survey in 1914 reveals the cultivated area in England was then about 3.4 million hectares (8.3 million acres). So there may have been almost as much land under plough by 1086 as at the start of the First World War.

Domesday Book also proves England was tightly governed. The survey could not have been made without the machinery of government that the Anglo-Saxons bequeathed to the Normans. It confirms that England possessed a sophisticated system of coinage, an effective system of taxation, a hierarchy of public courts and a robust system of justice.

All of this enabled English kings to exploit their kingdom's wealth efficiently. But that is precisely why Duke William risked everything to invade England in 1066. In other words, Domesday Book proves that Anglo-Saxon England was a victim of its own success.

What does Domesday Book reveal about the impact of the Normans in England?

It provides irrefutable testimony to the fact that the Normans exploited the windfall of 1066 by displacing the English elite and extorting the peasantry. The English nobility was virtually wiped out. Domesday's tables of contents list about 500 tenants-in-chief in 1086. Just 13 of them were English. The kingdom was now dominated by a new class of super-rich Frenchmen gorging on their success.

The kingdom was now dominated by a new class of super-rich Frenchmen gorging on their success

Writing a generation or so after the Domesday survey, a monk named Orderic Vitalis, half-English and half-Norman by birth, offers a vivid description of Earl Hugh, one of William's richest magnates. "He was more prodigal than generous; and went about surrounded by an army instead of a household. He kept no check on what he gave or received. His hunting was a daily devastation of his lands, for he thought more highly of followers and hunters than husbandmen or monks. A slave to gluttony, he staggered under a mountain of fat, scarcely able to move."

The Domesday inquest compelled Hugh to produce a precise account of what he gave and received. It confirms that he was fabulously wealthy, with more than 300 estates scattered across 19 shires, generating an income of about £900 a year. That may not sound much, but in 1086 it amounted to more than one per cent of the nation's wealth.

Some English landholders continued to hold property in reduced circumstances as subtenants, but even they were in a small minority. Domesday records that about 8,000 subtenants held land from tenants-in-chief, but only about 10 per cent of them were English,



An illustration shows Anglo-Saxon aristocrats enjoying the fruits of their wealth, c1030. As Domesday Book reveals, that wealth was soon to be appropriated by the Norman elite

and they held less than four per cent of the landed wealth of England between them. Most subtenants suffered loss of freedom and status. Consider Æthelric of Marsh Gibbon in Buckinghamshire: he held his land there freely in 1066, but in 1086 he told the Domesday commissioners he held it from a Norman lord “onerously and miserably”.

The Conquest also had a catastrophic impact on the English peasantry. The book proves that much of Yorkshire and the north-west Midlands had been laid waste in retribution for rebellions that took place early in William’s reign. It also demonstrates that there was a drastic fall in the number of free landholders across the country, a dramatic increase in the number of manors, and an equally dramatic increase in rent. The average rent-hike in Norfolk was 38 per cent.

Writing in the early 12th century, William of Malmesbury lamented that “England has become a dwelling-place of foreigners and a playground for lords of alien blood. No Englishman today is an earl, a bishop, or an abbot; new faces everywhere enjoy England’s riches and gnaw her vitals, nor is there any hope of ending this miserable state of affairs.”

The Book offers less-eloquent but emphatic support for his melancholic testimony.

What else can the survey tell us?

Because Domesday Book has existed for more than 900 years and has been intensively studied for centuries, it might seem reasonable to assume that its potential for research has been exhausted. Nothing could be further from the truth. Exciting new resources are making it more accessible than ever, and have opened up the possibility of addressing new questions.

Take, for example, the structure of landed society before and after the conquest. No one yet knows how people held land in 1066 or 1086, nor how much wealth was distributed between them. This is mainly due to logistical difficulties – the sheer scale of Domesday Book, its layout, and the challenge of differentiating people with the same names has prevented scholars from working this out.

However, a team of researchers based at King’s College London and the universities of Oxford and Cambridge has published a database linked to mapping facilities as part of the Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England (PASE), a searchable database of all of the

people who made an impression on the historical record of that era. Researchers are now using this resource to address one of the great questions of English history: what was the impact of the Norman conquest on the structure of English landed society? PASE Domesday is also freely available online (at www.pase.ac.uk), so that anyone curious to know who held land in their village at the time of the conquest can find this information quickly – and generate maps of where these lords held land throughout the kingdom.

Meanwhile, another team of researchers based at King’s and Oxford is working on Exon Domesday, aiming to make facsimile images, text and translation accessible online (www.exondomesday.ac.uk), and to explore what this crucial manuscript reveals about the Domesday survey and the Conqueror’s government in action. Domesday Book’s own day of judgment still lies in the future. **H**

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HISTORY **EXPLORER**

Stephen and Matilda's fight for the throne

Professor David Crouch and Charlotte Hodgman visit **Wallingford Castle** in Oxfordshire, which played a key role in a vicious civil war in the 12th century

With its impressive central mound and tower, high protective walls and deep defensive ditches, Wallingford Castle

must have posed a formidable challenge to besieging forces in the medieval period. Among them were those of King Stephen, who sought to take the fortification from his would-be usurper, Empress Matilda, on a number of occasions between 1139 and 1153.

Today, little remains of the mighty fortress that overlooked a key crossing point on the river Thames. Small, scattered sections of the castle's stone walls can be found at various points in the 16-hectare (41-acre) site now known as Wallingford Castle Meadows. The most complete section, however, is the ruins of St Nicholas' Collegiate Church, a building that stood within the castle walls and can now be accessed via a relatively steep set of steps. Standing in the shadow of the huge motte – accessible via a wooden suspension bridge – the limestone ruins remind us of the castle's long history and its strategic importance in the fight for the English crown following the death of Henry I in 1135.

"Succession was a flashpoint in any medieval nation's history," says David Crouch, professor of medieval history at the University of Hull, "but England was notorious for having no succession customs. The person who took the throne was generally he – or she – who made the most of the opportunities available to them."

Henry made every effort to ensure a straightforward succession, nominating his

only surviving legitimate child, Matilda, as his heir before his death. The great barons and nobles of England had sworn to support Matilda's claim to the throne, and she had been married to one of the most powerful men in France: Geoffrey, Count of Anjou. Henry, it seemed, had set his daughter up to move smoothly into the role of England's first reigning queen.

"Henry's death couldn't have come at a worse time," says Crouch. "He died in the middle of a ferocious row with his son-in-law – a dispute that saw Matilda side with her husband against her father – and it is even said that Henry had released his magnates from their oath of support for Matilda's succession. Whether this was the case or not, when Henry died after more than 35 years on the throne, the scene was set for a desperate scramble for power."

Power struggles

Henry, like his father William the Conqueror before him, had ruled both Normandy and England, and after his death the Norman barons decided to ignore Matilda's claim in favour of Henry's nephew Theobald, Count of Blois, who they felt would benefit their interests the most, as well as bring the principalities of Normandy and Blois into alignment.

But as Theobald arrived triumphantly in Rouen, confident of his support, he must surely have been shocked to discover that his younger brother, Stephen, had dashed ahead to London – where he had already been crowned.

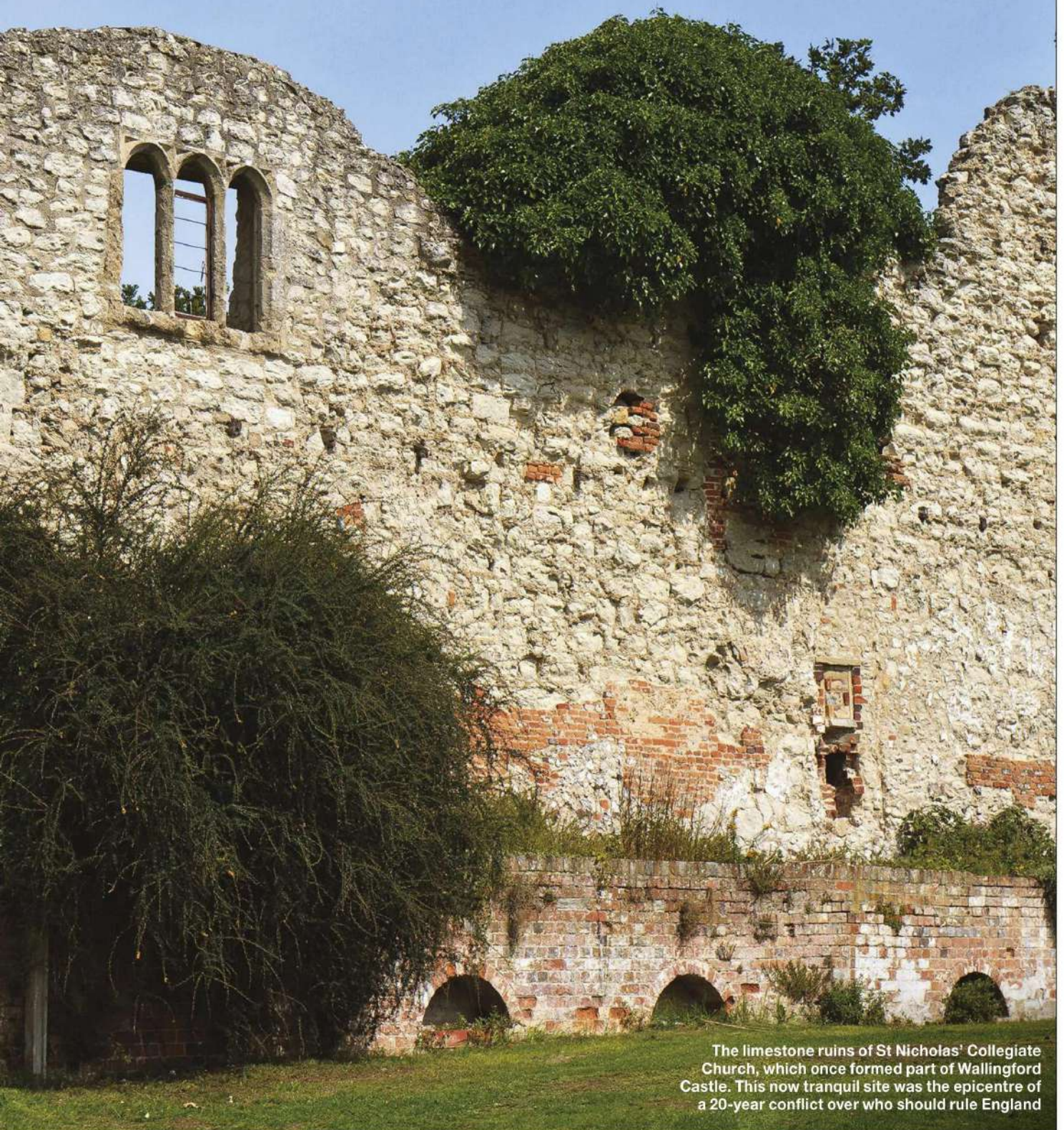
"London was a huge city in medieval terms, and the opinions of its people carried



ALAMY

“When Henry I died, the scene was set for a desperate scramble for power”

PROFESSOR DAVID CROUCH



The limestone ruins of St Nicholas' Collegiate Church, which once formed part of Wallingford Castle. This now tranquil site was the epicentre of a 20-year conflict over who should rule England



A 1253 depiction of King Stephen, whose charisma won over the people of London

great weight,” says Crouch. “Stephen’s appeal to Londoners lay partly in his personality – he was by all accounts a very affable man – but also with the fact that his wife was Countess of Boulogne, a town that was a point of access for trade on the continent. Stephen’s coronation, therefore, was seen to be in London’s best interests.”

But what of Matilda, Henry’s nominated heir? Without the support of the Norman barons, Matilda could do little to stake her claim to the throne. Her uncle, David, king of Scotland, had invaded England on her behalf after Henry’s death; however, he had been unsuccessful, and in 1136 he made a peace settlement with Stephen at Durham. All Matilda could do was wait for an opportunity to present itself.

The first years of Stephen’s reign went well, but in 1137 tensions surfaced among certain factions at court as the king began to neglect those key men who had served at the core of Henry’s government, in favour of his friends, notably the charismatic Waleran de Beaumont. The king’s failure to put down a rebellion against English occupiers in Wales was the last straw, and in 1138 growing dissatisfaction became open revolt.

“England can be seen to have staggered into rebellion in 1138,” says Crouch, “and when civil war did finally break out, it was very territorial. Generally speaking,

Matilda’s support could be found in the south-west of England, where her half-brother and chief supporter, Robert, Earl of Gloucester, had land. Yorkshire, East Anglia and London were for the king, while the Cotswold area in between became something of a war zone.”

One baron who eventually switched his allegiance from Stephen to Matilda was Brian fitz Count, Lord of Wallingford and Abergavenny. Like many other barons, fitz Count had initially accepted Stephen’s rule, but defended his later defection by citing the oath he had taken under Henry I to support his daughter’s claim. Soon after, Stephen attacked fitz Count’s castle in Wallingford, which had become an important stronghold for Matilda’s faction (Stephen made further attempts to take the castle in 1145/6 and again in 1152, but failed in his endeavours.)

Matilda herself arrived in England in 1139, landing in Arundel and staying under the protection of Henry I’s widowed second wife, Adeliza of Louvain, at the town’s castle. Unwilling to risk offending Adeliza by attacking the castle, Stephen instead decided to broker a deal with the empress, and she was granted safe passage to Bristol, where she was reunited with Robert of Gloucester.

Becoming queen

Stephen probably regretted his decision to allow Matilda to return to her faction when, in February 1141, he was captured by the combined forces of Robert of Gloucester and the Earl of Chester after being defeated in battle outside Lincoln’s city walls. At the mercy of his captors, the king was taken to Bristol Castle where he was held, in chains, for some 10 months on Matilda’s orders.

“Stephen’s treatment in Bristol reveals much about Matilda’s character,” says Crouch. “He was placed in leg irons, despite being an anointed king; this seemingly vindictive act shocked his subjects and did little to increase the empress’s popularity.

“Matilda’s lack of discretion and sensitivity in the way she treated her magnates at court is well documented by

VISIT

Wallingford Castle Meadows



Castle Lane, Wallingford, Oxfordshire

● www.earthtrust.org.uk/Places

medieval chroniclers. After Stephen’s capture, her route to the throne looked clearer than it had ever been, yet she is described in contemporary sources as alienating members of her court with her uncontrollable and spiteful behaviour.”

With Stephen imprisoned and unable to marshal his support, Matilda seized the initiative and made it as far as Westminster in her bid for the crown. There, she was accepted by the population of London – as Stephen had been some six years earlier – and preparations began to take place for her coronation.

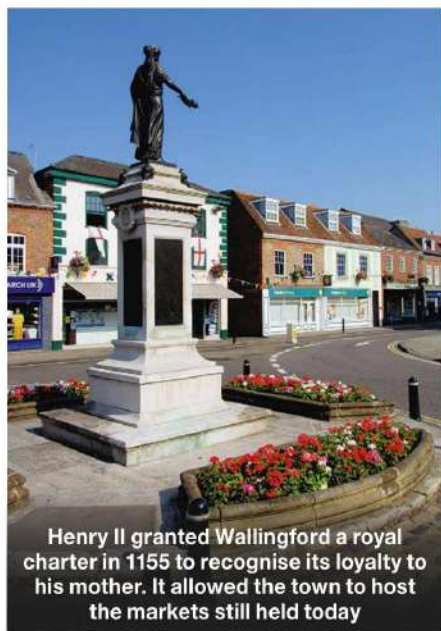
“By 1141, victory looked to be well within Matilda’s reach,” says Crouch. “Her rival to the throne was in prison and the inhabitants of the most important city in England had accepted her as their reigning queen. But the tables turned dramatically when, just two days before her coronation, she alienated both new and old sources of support.”

ALAMY



MATILDA SHRIEKED AT HER PETITIONERS AND BANISHED THEM. IN ONE FELL SWOOP SHE HAD LOST THE CITY AND ITS SUPPORT

STEPHEN & MATILDA: FIVE MORE PLACES TO EXPLORE



Henry II granted Wallingford a royal charter in 1155 to recognise its loyalty to his mother. It allowed the town to host the markets still held today

"As tradition dictated, Matilda was petitioned by Londoners for tax concessions and other favours in the run-up to her coronation. But, instead of wooing her new subjects with generosity and magnanimity, Matilda, as was her way, granted no favours, shrieked at her petitioners and banished them from her presence. In one fell swoop she had lost the city and its support."

Realising they would gain nothing from Matilda's reign, the rejected Londoners returned to the city, where they proceeded to ring the bells. Men of London's militia

ALAMY

The medieval road bridge across the Thames connects Wallingford and Crowmarsh Gifford. The original bridge played a key role in Stephen's sieges of the town



poured into the streets and an angry mob advanced on Westminster, forcing Matilda to flee to Oxford for her own safety.

Matilda's bad luck continued when, in September 1141, Robert of Gloucester was captured at Winchester by Stephen's queen – also Matilda – who had led an army of Flemish mercenaries and loyal barons there to fight Stephen's cause.

A prisoner exchange took place soon after, and Stephen was free to resume his place on the throne and pursue his would-be usurper to Oxford, where Matilda had based her campaign. As Stephen attacked the city, laying siege to Oxford Castle where the empress was residing, Matilda managed to escape. She fled first to the abbey at Abingdon before moving on to Wallingford Castle.

The war dragged on with neither side able to deliver the crucial final blow but, with Robert of Gloucester's death in 1147, the military heart went out of Matilda's campaign and she finally left England for Normandy, resigning her rights to the English throne to her son, Henry (later Henry II). He made several expeditions to England to try where his mother had failed.

"The final showdown took place in 1153, at Wallingford," says Crouch, "but it was far from the decisive battle Stephen had waited for. The two armies set up camp either side of the Thames, near Wallingford Castle, but in a dramatic twist, barons in both armies – many of whom had already made private peace treaties among themselves – refused to fight, forcing Henry and Stephen to iron out a peace settlement."

The agreement – which became known widely as the Treaty of Wallingford – was sealed in Westminster in December 1153, and saw Stephen formally acknowledge Henry as his adopted son and successor.

"The treaty was a remarkable event in British history," concludes Crouch, "and laid the groundwork for Magna Carta in 1215. Ultimately, the war was ended not by the anointed king but by a group of barons who decided to stand up to their king in order to ensure the peace of the realm." ■



Words: Charlotte Hodgman.
Historical advisor: David Crouch (left), professor of medieval history at the University of Hull

1 Oxford Castle

Where Matilda made a daring escape
Matilda based herself at Oxford Castle in 1141 but quickly found herself under siege from Stephen's forces. Surrounded, the empress was forced to escape under the cover of darkness, allegedly lowered down the walls and dressed in white as camouflage against the snow. You can visit the castle's medieval motte, crypt and tower. oxfordcastleunlocked.co.uk

2 Wareham Castle

Where allegiances changed constantly
Built in the 12th century, Wareham Castle was often employed as a transit point for armies just arrived in England from western Normandy. The castle was seized on a number of occasions, allegedly changing hands five times between Stephen and Matilda. Today, only the motte and ditches of the castle remain. visit-dorset.com

3 Leicester Castle

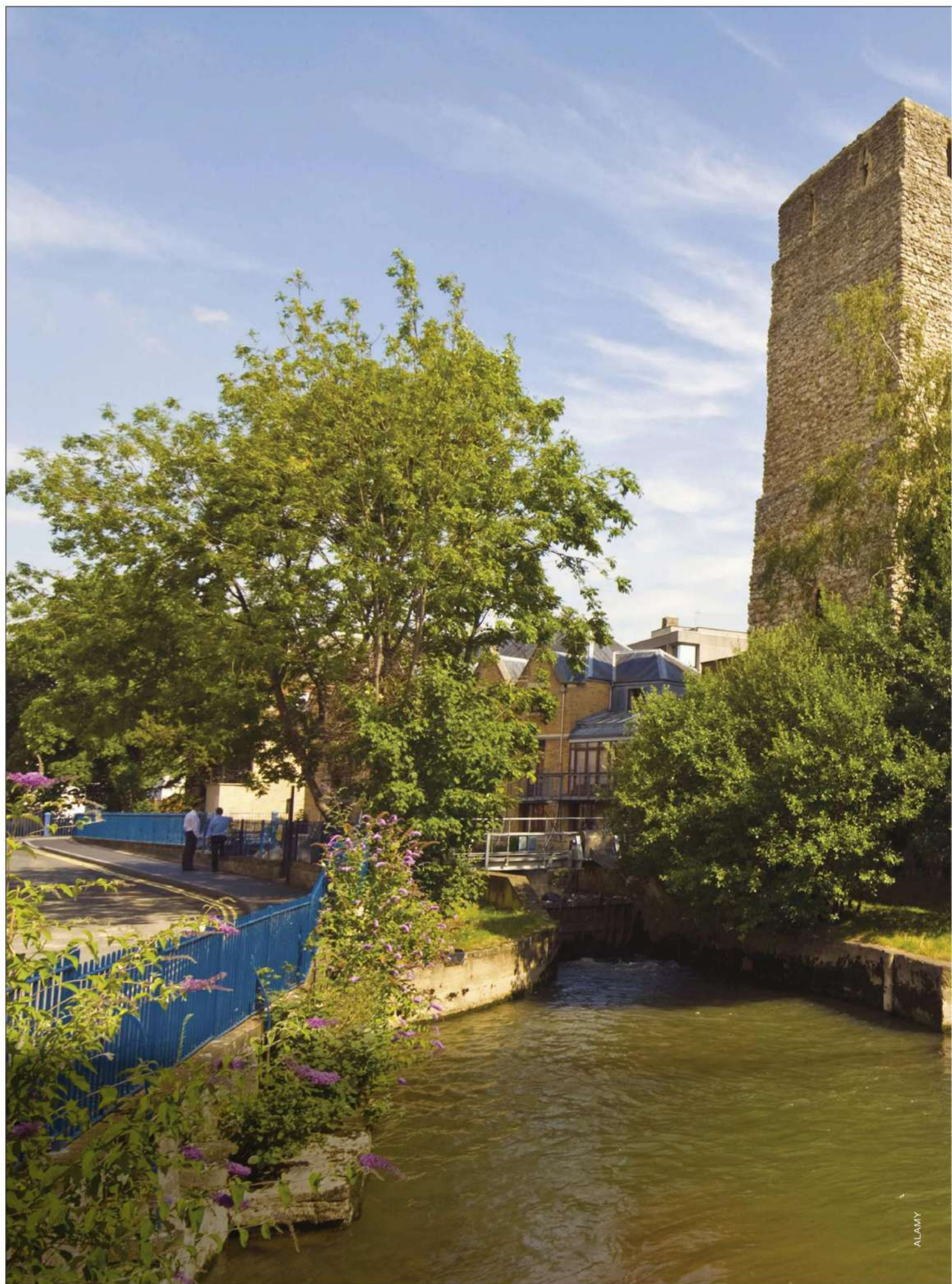
Where an earl promoted peace
The conflict was effectively ended by barons who made private peace treaties with each other to limit the effects of war. One of these was Robert de Beaumont, twin brother of royal favourite Waleran, who held Leicester Castle. A supporter of the king, Robert was one of those who led the movement for peace among England's greater earls. The great hall is among the medieval remains that are accessible. visitleicester.co.uk

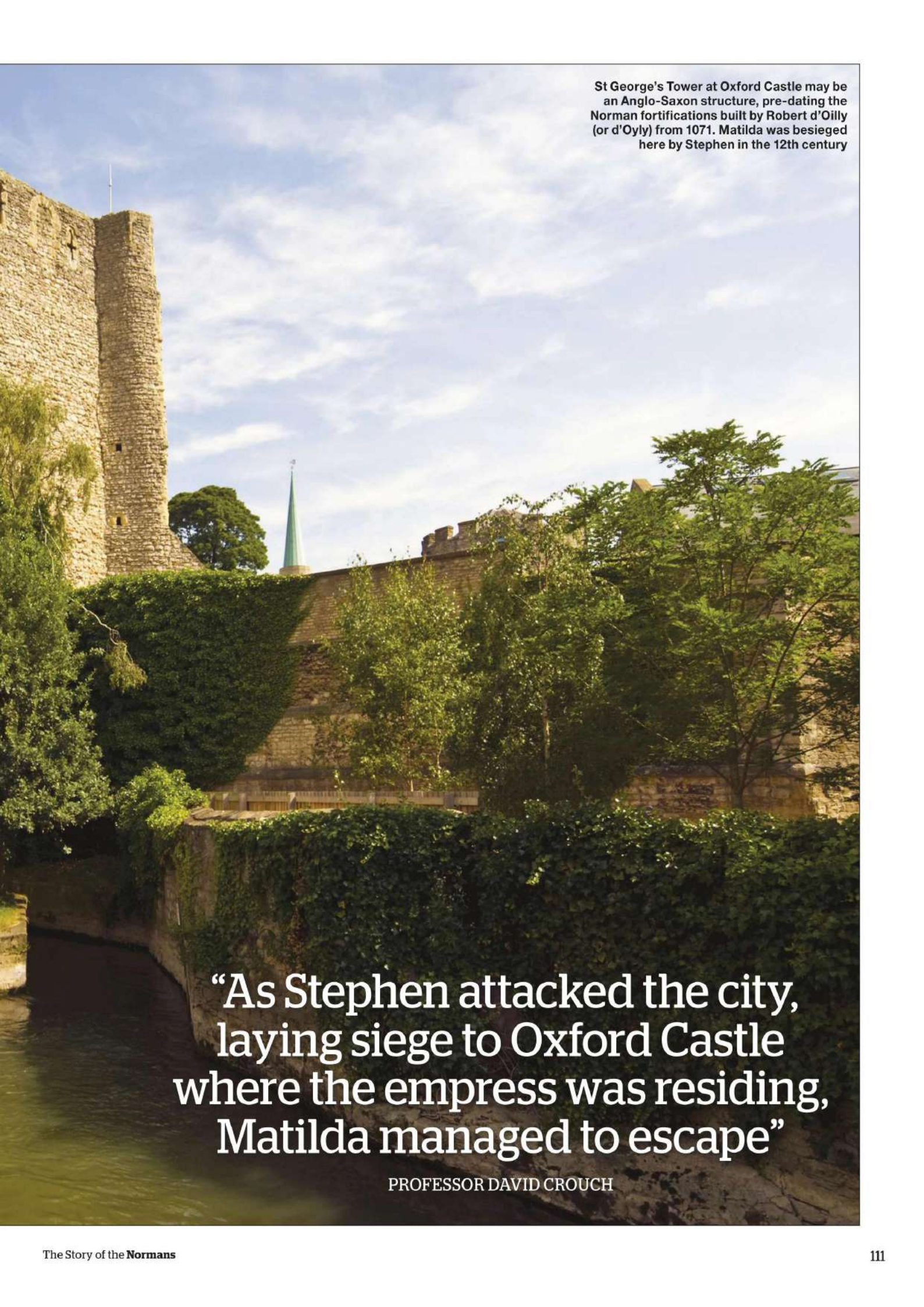
4 Winchester Cathedral

Where a peace treaty was announced
Stephen's brother Henry de Blois, bishop of Winchester, was one of the most powerful men in England, but transferred his support to Matilda after Stephen's capture in 1141. He later rejoined his brother, defending the city from Matilda. The treaty that ended the war was announced in the city's cathedral in November 1153. winchester-cathedral.org.uk

5 Northallerton, Yorkshire

Where Matilda's claim was defended
In 1138, David I of Scotland invaded England for a second time to defend his niece's claim to the throne. At the ensuing battle just outside Northallerton, David was defeated and forced to return north. battlefieldstrust.com





St George's Tower at Oxford Castle may be an Anglo-Saxon structure, pre-dating the Norman fortifications built by Robert d'Oilly (or d'Oyly) from 1071. Matilda was besieged here by Stephen in the 12th century

“As Stephen attacked the city, laying siege to Oxford Castle where the empress was residing, Matilda managed to escape”

PROFESSOR DAVID CROUCH



Marc Morris on... **the adaptable Normans**

“In the space of two centuries the Normans altered Europe more than any other ethnic group”

“Mention the Normans to most people in England, and the first thing they think of is the Conquest of 1066. And with good reason: William’s invasion that year changed England more than any other event in its history.

Prior to 1066 the Anglo-Saxons had some connections with western and central Europe but they were more strongly bound to Scandinavia and a world of longships, sagas and blood feuds. The coming of the Conqueror and his companions altered this forever, wrenching the country off its North Sea axis and realigning it with events and affairs across the English Channel – a brave new world of knights, castles, chansons and chivalry, with a church that was newly reformed and increasingly militant.

The scale of the transformation wrought by the Normans in England remains visible today, almost a millennium after their arrival. Giant cathedrals and abbeys at Winchester and Durham, Ely and St Albans; soaring castle donjons at Rochester, Richmond, Kenilworth and Corfe; the earthworks of hundreds of motte-and-baileys; the stonework of thousands of parish churches. England’s previous invaders, the Vikings, had destroyed far more than they built. The Normans unleashed an architectural revolution that was nothing short of a renaissance.

Understanding the story of the Normans in England is important because it helps dispel the myth that the English are God’s chosen people.

Think English is the most wonderfully rich and varied language on the planet? You may be right – but this variety and richness arises because it is a mongrel tongue incorporating thousands of Norman French words

borrowed as a direct result of the Norman Conquest.

Reckon the English are world leaders when it comes to freedom, fair play and democracy? Again, you may have a case, but don’t assume that these ideals emerged from the forests of Germany with the Anglo-Saxons. Before 1066 the Anglo-Saxon elite were still routinely murdering their political rivals, and up to a quarter of the English population were slaves. It took the coming of the Normans, for all their well-known ferocity in warfare, to abolish slavery in England and make political killing taboo. As one early 12th-century writer shrewdly observed, in this respect they treated the English better than the English had treated themselves.

A consequence of such rapid change in England was that it created a stark contrast between the English and the other peoples of Britain. The Scots and the Welsh already had longstanding differences with their southern and eastern neighbours, well illustrated in the latter case by the construction of Offa’s Dyke. After 1066, however, these differences became far more exaggerated. Having adopted the new attitudes introduced by the Normans, the English

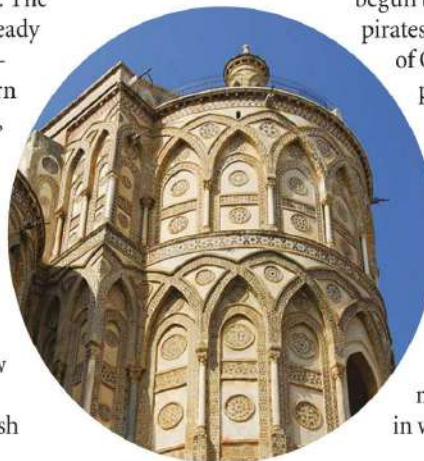
began to regard the Celts with a fresh and critical eye, noting not only their lack of towns, commerce, agriculture and castles, but also their continued readiness to seize slaves and kill their captured enemies. By the early 12th century the English had decided that the Scots, Welsh and Irish were barbarians, and were able thereafter to view wars against these neighbours as a civilising mission. The Norman conquest thus had a profound effect on all of the British Isles.

Willing to learn

And, of course, the impact of the Normans is not confined to Britain, but extends right across Europe. We may regard the Normans as merely one chapter in ‘our island story’, but the Normans themselves were not trammelled by such narrow thinking. To be sure, they had begun their own story as pagan pirates landing on the shores

of Carolingian France, plundering and destroying in typical Viking fashion. But within a century of their arrival they had transformed themselves, embracing Christianity and French culture, and remaking Normandy into the strongest and most dynamic duchy in western Europe. Some

External decorations on the apse of Monreale Cathedral near Palermo, Sicily



The Normans were great assimilators, recognising that the peoples they overpowered had plenty to teach them

ALAMY



The cylindrical piers (columns) of the magnificent nave of Durham Cathedral, built by the Normans from 1093, are decorated in a distinctively Anglo-Saxon style

50 years before the conquest of England they were already venturing into the Mediterranean, where they would forge new kingdoms and principalities in Italy, Sicily and Palestine.

They took with them those aspects of their culture they most cherished: family histories that celebrated Norman prowess, cunning and guile, and the liturgies to which they had listened in the churches of their homeland. But in southern Europe, as in England, they proved to be great adaptors and assimilators, recognising that the peoples they overpowered with their superior military skills had plenty to teach them in return. Durham Cathedral may be a triumph of Norman engineering, but the columns of its nave are decorated in a style that is unmistakably Anglo-Saxon. The Norman kings of Sicily employed Byzantine and Arab craftsmen to build their palaces and cathedrals, and presided over a cosmopolitan court of Christians, Jews and Muslims.

So willing, indeed, were the Normans to assimilate that what was unique in their culture did not long endure. In England they soon learned to speak English, just as their cousins in the Mediterranean quickly became fluent in Arabic and Greek. Everywhere they settled, the Normans were eager to reinforce their claims to authority by marrying local women, accelerating the process by which their own identity was eventually subsumed.

Surveying the court of William the Conqueror's great grandson Henry II, the treasurer Ralph fitz Nigel admitted that it was impossible to say who was English and who was Norman. The mosaics of Roger II of Sicily show him dressed in the robes of a Byzantine emperor rather than the mail-shirt of a Norman knight. By 1200 the Normans in both regions had effectively gone native. In the space of two centuries, however, they had altered Europe more than any other ethnic group, and their legacy survives as a permanent reminder of our common European heritage. **H**

Marc Morris is a historian and broadcaster who specialises in the Middle Ages. His books include *The Norman Conquest* (Hutchinson, 2012) and *King John: Treachery, Tyranny and the Road to Magna Carta* (Hutchinson, 2015)

The Normans in numbers

Facts and figures about their actions and legacy

More than **100,000** people died as a result of the Harrying of the North

William the Conqueror was **173cm (5' 8")** tall – 3cm taller than the average medieval adult male.

His queen, Matilda, was **152cm (5')** tall, not 127cm as is sometimes erroneously asserted



William's invasion fleet of 1066 numbered 696 ships, according to the chronicler Wace

At **38 metres** (125 feet), Rochester Castle in Kent has the **tallest Norman castle tower** in Britain



Henry I fathered at least 21 (possibly 25) **illegitimate children** – more than any other English monarch

Around 500 castles were built by the Normans in England and Wales in the generation after 1066

The interior of Monreale Cathedral in Sicily is adorned with **6,500** square metres of mosaic



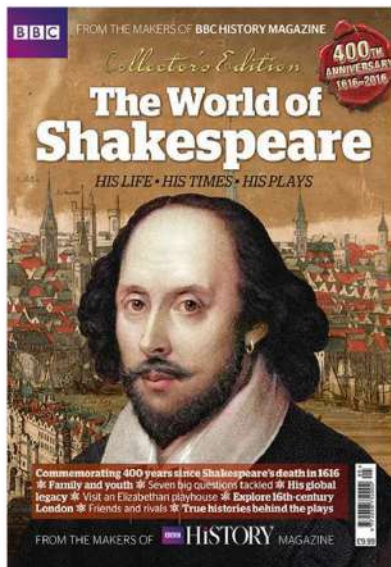
Domesday Book contains approximately **2 million words**, and lists about **13,000 manors**

The nave of the Norman cathedral at Winchester measured **81 metres** (266 feet) – the longest north of the Alps

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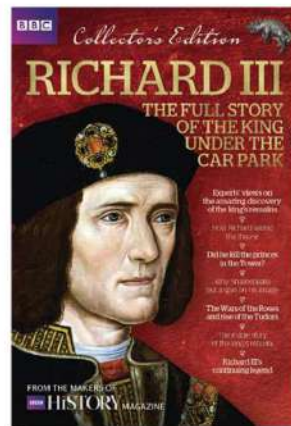
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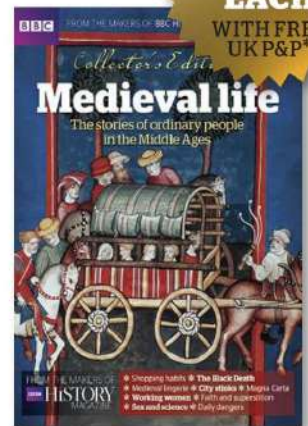
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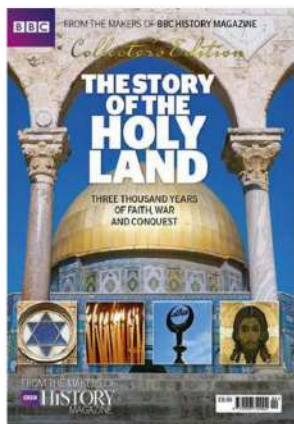
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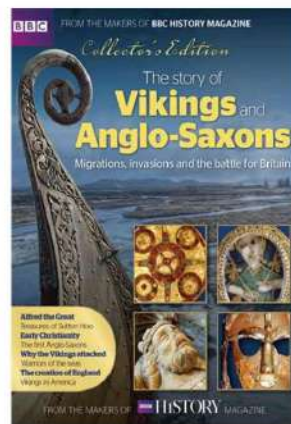
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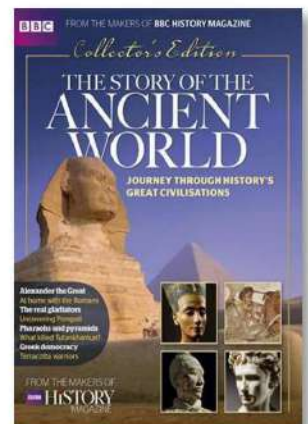
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Your next break in Normandy?

2016 marks the 950th anniversary of the Norman invasion.

Born in Falaise, William, Duke of Normandy, became the Conqueror at the Battle of Hastings in 1066, the story of which is told in the unique Bayeux Tapestry. To celebrate this occasion, from summer through to December, there will be medieval merriment for everyone throughout Normandy with street markets, festivals, music, dance, sound and light shows and special exhibitions in the towns and villages associated with William the Conqueror and his momentous expedition.

A très bientôt en Normandie !

medieval-normandy.co.uk

